

HIS LOVE MADE HER A WOMAN—
AND A FUGITIVE!



This Fiery Promise

Joan VanEvery Frost

HE AWAKENED HER SENSES TO AN ECSTASY SHE HAD NEVER KNOWN!

When lovely young Ellen Kirby met Don Carlos Alvarez, the entire course of her life changed in an instant. Despite her father's opposition, she married the handsome Mexican and left her beloved home for an alien land.

But the aristocratic world of Mexican society into which Ellen entered as a passionate bride was already being shaken by the tremors of Revolution and was soon to crumble about her. She felt an answering tumult in her heart, as she began to doubt her husband's love and found herself reaching out for affection to other men.

Driven from their lands by savage bandit hordes, Ellen and the two men she loved embarked on a perilous flight to freedom that was to tax her strength and courage to its limits—and beyond!

*He Kissed Her Again,
His Mouth More Insistent
This Time . . .*

They felt each other's bodies smooth and close and warm, beginning to beat with a pulse of awareness that quickened them, every nerve end feeling, seeking, wanting. With his mouth and large clever hands and even for a time his words, he made love to her in earnest then, and at first slowly and finally running he brought her with him into a far country where she had never been before, where there was no fear, no pain, no sorrow, nor any shame.

"Can you, love? Can you now?" he cried at last, and like the burning wheel at the *castillo's* top they went soaring off, up, up into the dark sky behind their eyelids, showering flaming sparks of fire until the final explosion of incandescence that left them clinging together shattered and was spent.

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Joan VanEvery Frost

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A LEISURE BOOK

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There were times later on when—dirty, bone-achingly weary, and thoroughly heart sore—she used to think with longing of that last morning of her innocence. She would stare into the flickering flames of the tiny fire while she dreamt herself back to that gloriously uneventful breakfast.

"We'll be having a guest for dinner and to stay the night," her father said the morning after his return from Santa Barbara. "He may even stay over a week or so."

"Who is he?" Ellen Kirby asked, helping herself to one of Rosa's biscuits and slathering it with butter and honey.

"He's a big land owner name of Alvarez from Mexico, somewhere around Guadalajara. He wants to buy some of our colts and five seed bulls to ship down there by train. Sounds like he's rolling in money, but I think it's pretty peculiar he wants to buy them before he's even seen them."

"Well, everyone knows our horses outrun everything in sight and make good roping and cutting horses besides.

We've got the only purebred Hereford herd in this part of the state." Ellen poured herself a second cup of coffee. "It seems to me there wouldn't be anywhere else west of Texas for him to go." She thought a moment and grinned. "If he's like most rich Mexicans I've seen, he has a pot belly and gold teeth."

Her father shrugged. "The Owens introduced me to him. He's a handsome devil, and speaks better English than I do. By the way, the Owens bought an automobile, a Thomas Flyer. It won't be long before Santa Barbara isn't fit for a self-respecting horse and buggy."

"It's not as if I haven't been trying to get you to buy one," Ellen reminded him. The morning sun struck in through the window on her thick coil of blonde hair, turning it to burnished gold.

Her father's face softened as he looked at her. "Sometimes you put me in mind of your mother so much I almost forget who you are," he murmured.

Ellen felt a guilty stab of jealousy. Why couldn't her father love her for herself, but always for the mother she had never seen. One day he'll wish he hadn't kept mooning over a woman nearly twenty years dead, she pouted to herself childishly. With a wry smile at her own foolishness, she went on to speak of ranch business, the branding that was due the next week, castrating the yearling colts, burning off the greasewood in the Hundred and Eighty to allow the wild oats to grow once more.

That afternoon when she came over the hill above the ranch yard after a long ride on Cissy, the half-broken bay filly she was training, she saw a puff of dust on the dirt track that disappeared off between two oak-covered hills toward the Santa Barbara road. She pulled up the horse-hair reins of the filly's rawhide hackamore, and horse and rider stood watching the lone horseman who came on at an easy, distance-eating canter. She saw her father limp out to meet him, his leg still stiff from the multiple break

where Pico had fallen on him six months before. Ellen squeezed Cissy with her legs and came down off the hill at a trot.

In the stable yard she gave a gasp of admiration when she saw the visitor's horse up close. He was a dark chestnut stallion with lighter red mane and tail, his slim legs flowing gracefully up into a powerful chest and hindquarters. Joe was unsaddling him, lifting the heavily silver-mounted mahogany-colored saddle from the horse's steaming back as the stallion bowed his neck and played noisily with the silver roller bit in his mouth.

"That there's a horse and no foolin'," Joe said admiringly as he staggered off on his short bowed legs to the tackroom hauling the heavy saddle. "I never thought them greasers had anything like him in Mexico, no more'n scrub ponies and burros."

Ellen tied a cotton rope around the stallion's neck and unbridled him, drawing the silver-encrusted straps off over his short ears. He pushed her playfully with his nose, and she thought approvingly that here was a horse that had never been ill treated. She patted his neck.

There's supposed to be a carriage and team following later. Gawd only knows how much silver there'll be on that outfit," Joe went on, taking the bridle from her and rinsing the bit in a bucket of water at the tackroom door.

"Oh, his wife is coming too?"

"Nope, only said as how it would be bringing his baggage."

Ellen unsaddled Cissy and turned her out in the holding field where the filly promptly rolled in the grass, squirming comically on her back with her four legs waving awkwardly in the air. Strange, Ellen thought, how graceful a horse could look rightside up and yet how ridiculous on his back. She realized that for some reason she was putting off meeting the stranger. Ellen was more handsome than pretty, with wide cheekbones, a bold

nose, green eyes, and a large full mouth. Though she wore a hat, it habitually spent most of its time hanging down her back from the chin strap, and her skin was a clear, warm tan. Her best feature was her thick blonde hair that hung halfway down her back, generally pinned up in a large coil at the back of her head.

Girls of her age far plainer than she were long since married, while she managed to attract mainly disapproval from the young men round about. They were not only afraid of her father but somewhat afraid of her as well, for she was outspoken and had none of the simpering silliness they had come to expect in girls. Not only that, but she dressed nearly as a man, her divided riding skirt the only gesture toward femininity she made. The young bucks snickered behind their hands away from her and professed to wonder if she smoked cigars at home, or perhaps chewed tobacco, cruelties that salved their egos.

Ellen's father had belatedly realized that he had something of an ugly duckling on his hands, and he sent her off for three excruciating years to a finishing school in Pasadena, where she learned that she had no interest whatsoever either in such amenities as pouring tea and playing a musical instrument, or in cultivating further the attentions of the spoiled rich young men with whom she came in contact. More sophisticated than the ranch boys, they were not intimidated by her, yet even they could not take her seriously, treating her more as a comrade than as a girl. She had to admit that some of them were marvellous riders, and there was a glorious occasion on which she and a handful of young male horsemen crashed the Hunt Ball masked on horseback, but on the whole she found herself only terribly homesick for the golden hills of home with their oak woods and sycamore-lined draws.

She walked slowly up to the ranch house, a large, rambling place with thick adobe walls, heavy hand-hewn rafters, and a red tile roof. Alfalfa grew like a lawn around

the house, which was shaded by a couple of enormous live oaks. As she came from the outdoors into the large dim living room, she stood still for a moment to let her eyes adjust, and found herself staring into the interested dark eyes of the most elegant, handsome man she had ever met. Though not as tall as her father, his slimness made him seem taller than he was. His olive complexion showed off teeth startlingly white under his thin mustache, and his short brown jacket and pants decorated with silver braid might have been poured on him, so beautifully did they fit. Shining heeled boots of cordovan leather with small silver spurs inlaid with a complicated pattern of gold completed his striking attire.

When introduced to her, he bowed and kissed her hand so gracefully that it seemed natural. "*Enchanté.*" As he straightened, his dark eyes looked into hers boldly and yet somehow questioningly, asking something she didn't wish to identify.

"You'll have to pardon me," she said after an awkward pause. "We don't get many gentlemen in these parts, let alone gentlemen adept at kissing hands." She gave him a blinding smile.

"Damned if that finishing school may not have been worth it after all," her father laughed. "Come along, Señor Alvarez, we've just time before dark to take a look at the colts in the holding field."

"Please," their guest said, "do call me Carlos. I have a feeling that we are going to know each other quite well before all the negotiations I have in mind are over."

They left her standing there and proceeded across the ranch yard, talking animatedly. She went out to the kitchen to help Rosa with dinner, changing on the spur of the moment to a far more elaborate menu.

"We'll have the smoked loin of venison tonight, Rosa. I'll make the wine and garlic sauce for basting it. And let's see, fresh peas and yams, and I'll pick some lettuce right

now. The currant jelly will go well with the venison, and we'll have your fresh blackberry cobbler for dessert."

Rosa was the closest to a mother that Ellen ever had. A laughing girl of twenty-one when Ellen was born, she was now a plump laughing woman of forty. Singlehandedly she had held the household together when Ellen's father, ridden by guilt, hadn't cared if he lived or died, and slowly she insinuated Ellen into his affections as the heart blow of his wife's death eased a bit and he found that he was going to be able to stand to live after all. Some of Ellen's earliest memories were of trotting behind Rosa as she made her rounds in the little Mexican settlement at Las Cruces, where the dirt road that wound from the coast through various ranches including their own met the highway from Santa Barbara to Santa Maria and San Luis Obispo. Rosa, besides being surrogate mother and pillar of the household, was doctor, nurse, and midwife for the laborers' and herders' families living at the cross-roads.

"My father was a famous *curandero* in our village of Ixtepec," Rosa would tell her often, "and people would come all the way from Puebla to be cured by him. Before he died, he taught my mother much, and she passed it on to me. My mother's brother Nacho had come here and done well on the Alisal as a horsebreaker, so he sent for her. I was only three when we made the long trip by wagon and train, but I will remember days and days of heat and dust and scrub brush and cactus, nothing like the green mountains we came from.

"All my mother did was pray from the time we left until we finally arrived, and it must have helped because we came through safely. At that time there were many bandits on the roads in Mexico, for it was before the days of Porfirio's *rurales* police. We also had to worry about water and food and whether the wagon would break down. They used to have lots of trouble with the wheels

heating up in those days. At the border we sold the wagon and horses and took the train. It was the first time my mother had seen the ocean."

As Ellen picked the outer leaves from the young lettuce plants and gathered watercress from the stream that ran past the ranch yard, she thought of that terrible journey again and the hardships there must have been that Rosa didn't even remember. There were five of them who had gone in together to buy the wagon and horses, two newly married couples whose husbands didn't wish to spend their lives working on the nearby *haciendas*, and Rosa's mother who had a month-old baby that died on the trip, plus Rosa herself of course. These families were a kind of elite in their village with no debt and a little set aside. Whenever Ellen thought of Mexico, she thought of vast sun-blasted distances across which crept dusty wagons and coaches, their wheels moaning and complaining in the powdery heat. Rosa had once told her that the men of the village earned twenty-five *centavos* a day working on the *haciendas*, and that they had to pawn their children to borrow money for anything beyond bare subsistence. Most of them were in debt to the *hacienda* store, the *tienda de la raya*, besides. How had they managed to buy two horses and a wagon? Rosa didn't know. Perhaps a horse and wagon belonged to one of the couples. Rosa's mother must have had some money from her husband, who was well-to-do by village standards from his doctoring, and probably Nacho sent something also.

Ellen hurried through cleaning the lettuce and watercress and making the wine sauce so that she could take her bath before the men returned. The great wood-burning range also heated a metal tank of water, and since the kitchen was on the high side of the house, the water came out just the right temperature in the bathroom at the opposite lower end of the building. The house water was supplied by an all-year spring up on the hillside that filled

a large brick and cement cistern just below it, the overflow going on down to join the creek. Sheer gravity gave them all the water pressure they needed. Later on, Carlos exhibited a lively interest in their water system, wondering if it could be adapted to his *hacienda*. At present, water was carried by hand to the house from the aqueduct not far below. "If we used mules or oxen," Carlos conjectured, "the way they pump water from the mines, we could bring it up to a cistern above the house and pipe the house for running water."

On a whim, Ellen put on one of what she called her Pasadena dresses, emerald green satin cut low in front, and twisted her long hair into a single braid that she wrapped around her head like a thick golden crown. She put on her mother's silver necklace and earrings and pinched her cheeks and bit her lips to redden them. The green of the dress picked up the green of her eyes under their dark eyebrows, and even she had to admit that she had never looked better. What for? It was a question she didn't want to ask herself, let alone answer. On the surface it was to show Don Carlos that they weren't barbarians, that they too could be elegant.

She had lit the kerosene lamps and was just crossing the living room on her way to set the table when the men returned. Carlos stopped dead in the middle of a sentence when he saw her, then walked over and kissed her hand once again, his eyes this time never leaving her face.

"Your daughter is a beautiful woman," he said slowly, savoring the declaration and never taking his eyes from her though ostensibly speaking to her father.

Not even the Pasadena boys she had known were capable of bringing off gracefully a statement like that, let alone of making it with a certainty and self-assurance that took from it any hint of embarrassment. Her color heightened. "You flatter me, *señor*."

"Beautiful women should be flattered."

"Dammit, Ellen," her father broke in, "why didn't you get yourself up like that for young Billy Morton? You slouched around in your old riding clothes and hardly spoke to him." He turned to Carlos. "Hank Morton owns a ranch that runs in a strip between ours and the ocean. His boy Billy is going to agricultural school at the University of California. He'll make a damned good ranch manager one of these days."

"Billy Morton would only be embarrassed if I had dressed like this, Papa," Ellen said icily. "All he can talk about is cows and crops and fertilizer. I know as much about cows as he does, more about horses, and I don't want to know about crops and fertilizer. Ask him what he's read lately and you get a list of farm manuals. Besides, he has no chin."

Carlos laughed delightedly. "And what are you going to say about me? I think I have a chin, but there must be other features lacking. And I talk cows and horses, too."

"I don't know about you yet," she retorted saucily. "When I do, I'll let you know. Now you gentlemen had best get ready for dinner if you want a drink beforehand."

Dinner was a festive affair. Her father had put on his grey town suit, and Carlos wore a black velvet suit with ruffled white shirt front that would have looked foolish on any other man she knew. On him it looked unbelievably elegant. Ellen noticed that Carlos ate with a hearty appetite, and she wondered how he stayed so slim. He told many amusing stories beginning with, "When I was in Paris . . . When I was in London . . . When I was travelling in Italy . . . in Russia, in Lapland, in India, in Egypt . . ." Ellen lost track of the number of countries, and for the first time in her life she felt like a small town hick. She had never even been outside the state. He spoke of the famous white beef cattle of France and the hardy exotic Brahma cattle of India, Scotland's black Angus and her reds with the hair hanging down their faces, and he talked knowl-

edgeably of their faults and advantages.

"After seeing all these, whiteface Herefords must seem awfully dull," she observed.

"On the contrary. The Herefords have one overwhelming advantage. They are here and can be shipped by rail. The others would have to come by ship, which would be very expensive indeed, and there would be many losses on so long a voyage. I'm anxious to see what might be done for their weakness for diseases by crossing them with our local slatsided longhorns." He took a sip of wine.

"How did you happen to come here? I should have thought Texas was closer."

"There was an outbreak of encephalitis there and I didn't want to buy any cattle or horse stock that might have been exposed. We have plenty of that in Mexico without going out of our way to import it. In fact, the Texas outbreak may have begun with animals from Mexico."

Ellen went to bed early, leaving the two men to their cigars and brandy and cattle talk. She would be out all day with Carlos since her father still found it painful to ride long hours, showing him the cattle and horse breeding herds. She didn't want to take a green horse like Cissy on such a long ride, so she would have to take her out early. She had found that skipping a day always made the filly skittish and fey.

The next morning the light was only just outlining the nearby hills as Ellen saddled Cissy. Not even Joe was up yet. Streamers of fog lay in the draws, and the pungent smell of oak leaf mold hung in the still morning air. A single star was still barely visible in the lightening sky as her horse breasted the slope above the ranch yard. A short level place followed, the wild mustard and thistles there reaching as high as the saddle, then another steep slope up to the ridge. By the time they reached the top, the first thin red sunlight gleamed on the golden wild oats and dark

green clumps of live oaks. Behind her Ellen could look down and see the ranch buildings far below; ahead past their line fence the golden slopes tumbled down toward the distant sea. This was the corridor of land her father coveted so. As she sat there taking in the fresh beauty of the morning, a large buck walked out of the mist at the head of a draw and stood for a moment in the sunlight that brazened his sleek hide and heavy branched antlers. Cissy snorted and sidled, and the buck, after a single disbelieving stare, bounded off down the draw in huge graceful leaps, his white tail visible briefly after the rest of him had blended into the mist. Never, she thought, could she bear to leave this beautiful fertile land that was a part of her very blood and flesh and bone.

When she returned, Joe was feeding the horses in the stable that was now full with the two horses from the buggy that had turned out to be rented and quite without silver trimming, and Carlos's stallion. She was retying the knot on Cissy's hackamore when she became aware without even turning around of his approach.

"If I had known you'd go out so early, I would have gotten up and come with you," he said. His perfect English had the faintest flavor of a more exotic tongue, more British really than Spanish.

"Never mind," she answered, "we'll be seeing lots of each other from now on. I have a feeling you may be heartily sick of me before the day is out."

"Do you really have that feeling?" His voice and expression were not in any way playful.

"No," she said, looking him in the eyes, "you know I don't." She was aware that almost from the beginning they had been speaking to each other in two languages, one the overt language that came from their mouths and the other made up of looks and feelings and hidden meanings that wove themselves into a many-colored tapestry of communication. Last night his stories of Paris and Russia

had been like the drumming of the male ruffed grouse, intended to say that he desired her. Her interested questions and flattering dress said that she was aware of him as a man and even possible lover. The impossible possible lover, she thought, whose love would never be consummated. He was an exotic foreign stranger who was dangerous to everything she held dear. The woman went with the man, and she would not leave this land that had so strong a hold on her, nor her father either, who she knew instinctively would oppose such a match. And after all, was it a match he was offering, or sheer masculine desire?

Ellen asked Rosa to pack them a lunch while she ate breakfast. Then she saddled Joker, a wide-muscled bay who could go all day and then keep it up all night if necessary. Today's ride was particaly to show off the breeding herds, but also to demonstrate what their thoroughbred-quarter horse cross was capable of. They started off riding down the creekbed to the permanent pasture area where the weanling calves would be fattened to long yearlings before going their separate ways as either beef or seed stock. The calves to be sold for beef would be turned over to the cattle buyers and the seed stock held to be exhibited the following year in the livestock shows in Santa Maria and San Luis Obispo where they would be bought by various ranches interested in improving their herds. The dark red calves with their white faces, manes, legs, and underbellies looked very handsome against the green grass. Young as they were, they showed the typical short-legged blocky build of a good beef animal.

"They make our cattle look like deer," Carlos laughed. "It's too bad they get so many sicknesses."

"We haven't lost many," Ellen said stiffly.

"How large is your ranch?" Carlos asked.

"About five thousand acres."

"Let's see, that would be something like two thousand

hectares. My *hacienda* is ten thousand hectares, a small one as they go, but we can't afford to give our cattle anywhere near the individual attention you do. Our *vaqueros* are illiterate and ignorant, and we're still trying to get them to stop cutting the ears and tails off their burros when they're angry with them. If a cow is sick, it is the will of God as far as they're concerned."

"How does your ranch run when you are away so much? You talk about Europe last year, and you are absent now and seemingly in no great hurry to return. You say that the men you hire are so ignorant—who tells them what to do?"

"Most *haciendas*, except the very smallest, have what you would call a foreman, or perhaps administrator might be a more accurate term."

"I take it that yours must be a very efficient gentleman."

"He's by way of being a countryman of yours, surprisingly enough."

"Isn't that unusual?"

"Except in the north, where there are a number of large American cattle holdings, very. His father was an American mining engineer and his mother is the daughter of my father's *padrino*, godfather. His father saw to it that he was educated in the United States, but he spent most of the time he was growing up on his mother's family's *hacienda*. It was he who got me interested in upgrading our stock, and what he doesn't know about horses isn't worth knowing. He's something of a veterinary and knows more than a little about gunsmithing. A very valuable man indeed."

"He sounds like an absolute paragon. Don't they have veterinarians and gunsmiths in your part of the country?"

"We are right between Guadalajara and Zacatecas though not in a straight line, and it's some two hundred kilometers from each. Consequently we have to be almost

completely self-sufficient. We grow our own food, shoe and doctor our own horses, and repair our own implements. There are workers on our *hacienda* who were born there and will die there without ever seeing a city or even a village other than their own."

"No wonder they're ignorant and illiterate. Don't you have schools for them?"

"What for? Educating them would only make them unhappy and dissatisfied. They have no reason to read and write, and most of them would balk at learning anyway. When it's hard to teach them not to gall a horse's back by riding him with too little padding under the saddle, how are you going to teach them something utterly impractical like reading?"

Ellen knew that there was precious little schooling that went on in the little settlement at Las Cruces, and she had to admit that even though many of the men worked at least part time on the ranch, neither she nor her father had actively done anything about the schooling of their children. The smaller ones didn't even speak English. Best change the subject.

The ranch was formed of a long valley between two lines of hills, at the upper end branching off into two smaller valleys like a Y. They were riding the ridge across the main valley from where she had watched the sun come up that morning. Threading their way around dense scrub live oak woods, they came upon a large meadow dotted with occasional large oaks around a natural lake. A herd of red and white cattle stood knee deep in the water chewing on the reeds growing around the edges. A bunch of horses dozed head to tail under the trees, their four-month-old colts stretched out asleep on the grass. Involuntarily Ellen drew rein, drinking in the beauty and peace of the scene before her.

"You love this land, don't you?" Carlos asked quietly. She nodded.

"Have you ever thought to leave it, that one day you will marry and perhaps go far away?"

Ellen looked at him as if seeing him for the first time. "Never. I'll never leave this country."

"Never is a long time, *querida*. There are other kinds of love that can prove more strong. Not every man has a weak chin and talks only of cows and fertilizer." He gazed at her calmly.

Later on under the shade of a tree as they ate sandwiches of cold smoked venison with spears of cucumbers and carrots and tiny red tomatoes on the side, he said, "Would you mind if I asked you something rather personal?"

"Go ahead and ask, though I don't promise to answer."

"Does your father always allow you to go out riding alone with strange men?"

"But you aren't a strange man."

"My dear Elena, you have hardly known me for twenty-four hours. In our country spending the day—or even a few hours—alone with a man would make a girl automatically unmarriageable to anyone else. And even the man himself would lose respect for her."

"And have you then lost respect for me?" she asked playfully.

"Don't make a joke of it!" he snapped unexpectedly. "I know you're not a loose woman, only a naive one, but every man might not see that."

"I will make a joke of it," she retorted angrily. "No one is going to lock me up in a dungeon like the girl in the fairy tale, what was her name? Rapunzel?"

Suddenly a lost anguished look came over his face and he reached slowly behind her head, pulling out the large ivory comb, allowing her hair to tumble down her back in a golden cascade. While she stared at him, lost in the depths of his dark eyes, he brought her hair over her shoulder, then buried his face in it, drowning himself in

the fine golden silk. She looked down at his neat dark head and her heart lurched inside her breast, threatening to beat its way through the bars of her ribs. She held his head tenderly in both her hands and laid her cheek on the dark close-cropped hair.

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel," he said huskily, "let down your hair."

At last he raised his head and looked into her face once again, and she knew that nothing in the world would ever be the same. "If you only knew," he murmured, "how I felt last night when I saw you in your green gown. I can't understand why some man hasn't taken you off long since, but I'm grateful, God knows I'm very grateful." He kissed her hand, his lips warm on her skin.

She laughed shakily. "Is this why I shouldn't ride alone with strange men?"

"You ride alone with any strange man but me, and I'll cut his throat and beat you." He was smiling, but the smile was bleak.

"Carlos, what's happened to us?" she asked, serious this time.

"I believe it's what they call falling in love," he replied lightly.

"Kiss me," she demanded.

He drew his hand gently down her cheek. "No, *querida*, I must not kiss you. If I kissed you now, neither of us would want to stop, and I prefer to have my bride untouched."

"Bride..." A flicker of fear shot through her. "But we've only just met. How do you know you want me as your bride?"

"I knew last night. I saw the fire and the ice and the innocence and the beauty—especially that glorious hair. I knew I had to have you, that you had to belong to me."

"And—and we would live in Mexico?" The great barren sun-blasted distances of Rosa's memories crashed across her mind, feeding her fear.

"Of course we'd live in Mexico, my love. That is my home, it is where I belong. You will learn to love it, too."

"Give me time to think, Carlos," she managed. Their conversation had taken maybe half an hour in all, and suddenly her whole world was turned upside down. She knew instinctively that her father wouldn't like it, just as she knew that she might never ride these hills again once she had left them.

"Naturally. My business in these parts should take a week or two, but I will speak to your father tonight to get him used to the idea. I don't want him to think that I have gone behind his back or abused the laws of hospitality."

"My father? Tonight?" she asked weakly. "Oh Carlos, you mustn't. Let him get to know you a little first. Let me get to know you a little as well. I'm afraid of what might happen otherwise. I—I would want his blessing."

"Have you always been such a dutiful daughter?" he asked shrewdly.

"Maybe not," she retorted, stung, "but I love him and I don't want to hurt him." She realized belatedly that she was talking as if the business of marrying this stranger and going off to a land back of beyond was already taken for granted. She shivered, suddenly more afraid than she had ever been in her life before. She knew for the first time what people meant when they said they felt as if someone was walking on their grave.

"Hold me, Carlos—I'm sorry, but I'm afraid."

They clung together and listened to the munching of the horses and the squeaking of the saddles as the animals grazed nearby.

2

The dust rose in a tall billowing column over the corral as the branding proceeded. Ellen on Joker and Carlos on his Adiós were doing the roping. One roped the head and the other the hind feet of each animal, backing their horses until the calf tipped over. The boy tending the branding irons and the fire would run over with a red hot iron that Ellen's father would take and place on the calf's flank. A puff of blue smoke, a smell of singeing hair, a loud bawl from the calf, and it was over for the heifers. For the bull calves, except for those with a purple stripe marking the white face, there was also the castrating. Oddly, they hardly seemed to mind that more than the branding. Ellen did, though. These poor things trotted off with the blood trickling down their hind legs, and she suffered for them.

She loved the cutting out, however. Joker was a squat, muscled little horse with dainty legs that looked too slim for him—much more quarter horse than thoroughbred. At eight years old he knew more about cutting and heeling

than she did, and the problem was staying with him through his lightning turns and changes of direction. These calves were being weaned away from their mothers, so it was necessary first to cut them away from the cows, who did their best to follow. There was constant movement, constant bawling and bellowing, and always in front of her the thick bay neck with its black mane and the small neat ears that worked all the time. As it was separated, each half-grown calf was herded through the gate into the branding corral. Later they would all be turned out into the holding field with the green colts to be watched for several days for infection. These calves were worth a great deal, for even the steers had won ribbons and high prices at stock shows, though they were less perfect in conformation than their whole brothers.

Ellen knew she was covered with dust and had stray strands of hair that hung down her back from under her hat. She felt as sweaty and dirty as Joker, and probably far more tired, for he was like a machine, rock-hard and untiring. Carlos had been in the same dust and heat as she, but he looked as clean and neat as he had when he mounted *Adiós* that morning. *Adiós* was not quite as good at cutting as Joker because he couldn't turn quite as fast on his longer legs, but he was a wonderful horse on the rope, keeping it just taut enough without dragging the calf. He and Joker worked together as if they had been partners for years. She and Carlos made a good team, too. Their own four cowhands plus an additional four borrowed from surrounding ranches for the rounding up sat on the corral fence making open comments about what they were seeing.

"That there Mex ain't so bad a-tall," Joe said to young Bobby Peake. "Lookit how he kin put thet loop right under the calf's belly so he can't help but step in it. Ellen's pretty slick, but I think he's better."

Ellen found herself glad that Carlos was better than she

was. Her intense awareness of him as a man told her that he wouldn't take it at all well to be bested by a woman, least of all a woman he had chosen for his own. Her father had decided to find Carlos a subject of friendly humor, just as well since two such determined men at odds with each other would cut short both the business deal and the visit, and Ellen desperately needed time. She pleaded with Carlos to wait several months until she could talk her father around, and then come for her. He wouldn't hear of it.

"You haven't changed your mind, *querida*? Perhaps you prefer staying with your father to going with me? Look at me, Elena." He tipped up her chin and looked into her eyes, then gently kissed her in the shadow of the great oaks, the moon riding high and white overhead. "I love you, I want you, Rapunzel—let us tell him tomorrow."

"Oh Carlos, I love you so. Believe me, it's not a matter of choosing between you—I've already chosen. But Papa is all alone, and I don't want to part from him in bitterness. He's been kind and loving and indulgent with me all my life, and I couldn't bear for him to regret it. Please understand. Look on this as a period for us to get to know each other better." She smiled, the moonlight dappling her face. "You might still discover, you know, that you would prefer some compliant *señorita* after all."

He made a face. "I've had compliant *señoritas* shoved down my throat since I was seventeen," he said. "If that was what I wanted, I'd have long since been married. There is all the time in the world to make a great lady of you, but forever would not put your spirit in the ladies I have known."

Ellen felt a warning chill. "What if I don't want to be a great lady?"

"Of course you want to be a great lady, all women do. When you've found out what it is to be with a man, you'll

know how glorious it can be to submit to one you love," he said huskily. "The man is the rock, the strength, the will; the woman is the helpmeet, the mother, the receiver. To love someone truly is to know the glory of fulfilling the role for which God made you. We were made for each other, you and I, Elena—don't deny us our love."

"At least wait until after the branding and you've shipped the animals you bought," she pleaded desperately, instinctively upset by the content of what to him was obviously both an emotional and intellectual credo concerning the relationship between men and women. "Then if he still objects and I have to go against him, we can leave without everything all half done. Maybe the seed bulls and the horses will be my dowry," she proposed, smiling. "We'll have two weddings, one here in Santa Barbara and the other wherever you want it in Mexico."

"We can have five weddings if you wish it, my love," Carlos laughed. "Let's see, one in Santa Barbara, and one in Nogales, and one in Mexico City, and one in Guadalajara, and one on my *hacienda*, La Purísima Concepción de Nuestra Señora de Santa Cruz de las Flores."

"What a splendid name—is that really what your *hacienda* is called?"

"It really is. And you'd best know who you're marrying as well. Here I am Carlos Alvarez. There, in my kingdom, I am Don Carlos Luis Cristiano Alejandro Alvarez Escobar y Mendoza. My father's ancestor came over with Cortez, and my mother's family have one of the most famous fighting bull ranches in Spain. I have a great uncle who was a cardinal, and there are various bishops scattered around on both sides. We'll be married by one of them in Guadalajara."

"Carlos?" she asked, the moon dappling her expression. "Are you sure I will fit into the world of Don Carlos Luis Cristiano Alejandro Alvarez Escobar y Mendoza,

whose *hacienda* of twenty-five thousand acres is considered small and whose relatives are high churchmen?"

"It wouldn't be so small," he said a little defensively, "except that we all decided before my father's death to make a separate operation of the sugar plantation of five thousand hectares, which is my brother Edmundo's. Salvador has the mines in Zacatecas."

"Carlos, Carlos," she laughed, "I am the daughter of a small rancher whose ranch really *is* small by anybody's standards. I have never seen London or Paris or even New York—I've never even been out of the state. You tell me that your sisters and their friends went to convent schools in France, and that you yourself went to school in England. How am I going to fit in with all that sophistication? Why, I thought the rich boys and girls in Pasadena were beyond me."

"Elena, I can see I've confused you. Our women are so much more sheltered than you that you would find it difficult to believe. Yes, they went to convent schools in France, and they learned French and embroidery and some music and some Latin. They also learned to pray a lot. But those nuns are famous for not teaching independence and thinking for yourself and having opinions other than your parents' or your husband's. The girls I know in Mexico are pale little shadows who will only become imperious and dictatorial when their children are grown. Then in our culture the shoe is on the other foot and everyone kowtows to *Mamacita*. I don't happen to want a pale little shadow that says yes until she becomes an overbearing old harriidan. My friends marry the pale little shadows with whom they have well-bred children, and they have their fun with their mistresses who are not pale shadows but lusty women with a sense of humor. In my wife," he finished proudly, "I want the best of both worlds, a good woman who is still a woman, not a compliant, ignorant cypher."

"If you see me like that, Carlos, it's the greatest compliment I've ever had. I'll do my best to live up to it, I promise you." She kissed him solemnly on the mouth.

It would have been so much simpler, she thought as they were unsaddling the tired horses, if her father had begun to suspect a relationship between them, but he seemed almost deliberately obtuse. He teased her about boys on nearby ranches, treated Carlos as if he were a friend of his own age instead of a man in his early thirties, and in general viewed them together as he might have viewed her with a favorite uncle. How was she ever going to get up the nerve to shatter his smug vision? That of course was before the ocean picnic.

"We all worked hard today," her father said expansively over barbequed steak that night, "and we deserve a holiday. The Mortons are going to join us at Pedernales and we'll have an abalone and lobster picnic. I'll take the long way around with the wagon and Joe and Rosa, and you and Carlos can ride over. You'll see some damned sorry excuses for cattle, Carlos, but the view out over the ocean is spectacular."

Ellen knew she should have been enormously pleased at the idea of a picnic and another long ride alone with Carlos, but for some reason she felt a sense of foreboding.

The corridor of slope facing the sea was about five miles wide, a short, easy ride. The fog had burned off early, leaving only a few streamers like fingers lying out across the blue of the sea, and well before they arrived at the beach, the sun began to feel hot.

"It'll be a scorcher at the ranch. We're lucky we picked today for the beach."

"Will your chinless friend, young Billy Morton, be there?"

"I suppose so," she answered idly, not really interested. "His school must be out by this time."

"And is he—was he—a suitor of yours?" Carlos persisted.

"If he was, he certainly made a secret of it," she said, her attention still not fastened firmly on the conversation.

"Why else would he have come around?"

Something in Carlos's tone suddenly made her focus on him. "Oh, he's very interested in Papa's purebred cattle. He told me he hopes to start with a small herd himself after he graduates, and then gradually replace the scrub cattle they have now."

"He didn't tell your father that?" His tone had become sharp.

"I don't see what you're getting at," she replied impatiently. "Of course he told my father—many times. We just happened to be out riding one day, and—"

"You were riding alone with him?" Carlos cut in.

"Well, of course I was riding alone with him! My father hasn't been able to ride much for six months, since the accident."

"That was a very imprudent thing to do," Carlos snapped.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, I didn't even know you then, and I've known Billy Morton since we were little children."

"I don't like the idea of your riding alone with men," he said stiffly.

"Well, the day before that, in fact for lots of days before that, I rode out with Joe. We always go in pairs when we're looking at the cattle so we don't miscount and forget to look for a missing cow or horse that could be hung up somewhere or sick. I suppose I was wrong to do that, too?"

"That's different. Joe is a servant, but young Morton is a suitor." Carlos's face was grim.

"Joe is *not* a servant," she protested.

"He works for your father, doesn't he? He gets paid for what he does, doesn't he?"

"Servant sounds so—so lowly. And silly, too, like calling Rosa a servant."

"Well, isn't she?"

"No, she's not. She's a part of the family. So is Joe. They've been here as long as I can remember. I could never think of them as servants."

"Elena, you've got to get these foolish ideas out of your head. Ofelia, our cook, has been on the *hacienda* as long as I can remember, and as a little boy I loved her. Little children grow up, though, and it's time to put feelings like that aside. When all is said and done, they are servants—loyal, faithful, loving servants, it's true, but servants nonetheless. You do them no favor by treating them as equals. That makes it hard on all concerned."

"You treat your people the way they used to treat slaves in our South. I refuse to say that I'm going to think of people like Rosa and Joe as slaves just because I've passed a certain age." She was angry.

"You're deliberately twisting my words." His voice was cold.

"Am I now? If you think that after I marry you I'm going to let you tell me how to feel about people, then think again. You may marry me, though I'm beginning to wonder even about that, but you won't own me. I told you, I won't be locked in a tower. If you want that then you had better change your mind about those pale little shadow girls because only a pale little shadow girl would put up with it."

"I've said nothing about locking you up anywhere," he retorted, exasperated, "though I'm beginning to give it serious consideration. If you had been brought up properly instead of being allowed to run wild like a little Indian, you would know that there are things ladies simply don't do."

"Is that so? I've never pretended to you that I'm a lady, as you put it, and I'm not going to start now. If you want someone who simpers and giggles behind her fan and

pretends that everything frightens her, then go look for her because that isn't me and never will be."

She kicked her surprised horse into a canter and left him fuming behind, Adiós dancing with impatience to catch up but held on a firm rein. They arrived at the beach singly, Ellen with a white set face and Carlos scowling blackly. To make it worse, it was Billy who walked out to meet her, a big grin on his face.

"Ellie, how great to see you! Manuel trapped the lobsters this morning, but he and I were just about to start diving for the abalone. Are you going to swim?"

"Of course I'm going to swim." She was positively delighted to see him. She realized suddenly that though she didn't think she would ever love him, she felt more at ease with him than she would ever be able to with Carlos. Why oh why couldn't people fall in love with the ones they should fall in love with? She patted her saddlebag. "I've got my bathing costume in here. Maybe your mother will hold a towel up while I change."

"Better yet, we've brought a bathing tent. Mother says she wants to dabble around in the shallow water, and we have my cousin Gloria with us. I don't think you've met her."

As they were talking, Carlos rode silently past and up to the crowd of older people, where Ellen's father began introducing him around. From the wagons came baskets of food, wine, lemonade and homemade root beer in bottles that were placed in the creek emptying into the ocean at one end of the cove, the striped bathing tent, boards and sawhorses to make a long table, wooden benches, towels, table cloths, utensils, and all kinds of odds and ends that long experience had shown to be useful. With Billy's aunt and uncle, Rosa, the Mortons' cook Josefina, and several men including Joe to do the hauling and take care of the horses, there were well over a dozen people milling about on the beach with much good

natured laughter and joshing. With a pang, Ellen saw that Carlos stood aside, lonely and brooding, the stranger who didn't belong. Well, it was his own fault, she decided rebelliously. Let him stew for a while.

Two by two they used the striped tent to change clothes, all except the two cowhands, who wouldn't have been caught dead in a bathing suit, and Rosa and Josefina, who thought swimming might be all right for the eccentric Anglo ladies, but certainly neither modest nor healthful for themselves. Billy and Manuel, the son of a local fisherman and Billy's boyhood companion, were wearing chopped off jeans that came to their knees and short sleeved undershirts. When Billy saw that Carlos alone was not in a bathing suit, he ambled over to him.

"If you haven't got a suit, Mr. Alvarez, I've got an extra pair of these cut down pants and another undershirt."

Ellen watched with interest to see what would happen. Billy's six feet three inches towered over the slim elegance of Carlos, leaving him at the distinct disadvantage of having to look up to reply. At first she thought he would refuse, but he suddenly became aware of her watching him and instead accepted gracefully. She giggled to herself as she surmised what he would have to say if she told him that up until Billy went away to school three years ago, she used to go swimming with him in the same outfit that Carlos was about to put on. Who even thought, she asked herself scornfully, that anyone could possibly swim in the kind of bathing clothes women were forced to wear. She had on, as did the other ladies, a sailor-collared overdress of dark blue that reached to her knees and was cinched in—at the waist. Under it were voluminous bloomers and long black cotton stockings. On her feet she wore rubber bathing shoes. The older women also wore corsets, but she balked at this, as she suspected did Billy's cousin Gloria, a voluptuous red-headed girl about her own age.

Manuel launched the old rowboat and paddled it out to some jagged rocks that rose up from the water several hundred yards offshore. Billy, with a whoop and a holler, ran out through the shallow water, dived through a wave, and plowed his way out toward the boat. Suddenly a slim form that she only belatedly recognized as Carlos ran lightly past her, the ragged shorts and white undershirt looking unexpectedly natural on him. He dived neatly through the next wave and soon caught up with Billy, his precise expert swimming stroke making Billy's untutored thrashing look like a walrus trying to race with a porpoise. Ellen grinned delightedly, realizing now why Carlos had changed his mind and decided to swim after all. Silly nit, she thought fondly, not to know that it was him she loved in spite of herself, never Billy.

After some conversation at the boat, she saw that all three of them planned to drive in turn, leaving one always with the boat. Billy went first, holding one of the large stones that they kept in the boat to give him depth in a hurry. Jammed through the belt that held up his pants was a short length of iron tapered at the end with which to pry the shellfish off the rocks. Down he went for a seemingly interminable time, then finally broke the surface again holding up an abalone triumphantly in one hand and brandishing his iron in the other. From then on they all three went to work in earnest, while on shore Rosa and Josefina built a driftwood fire and set a huge kettle of seawater on to boil for cooking the live lobsters that made the wet sack they were in move about in all directions as if it contained some large uncoordinated animal.

Ellen and the others meanwhile waded around in the shallow water, about all they could do if they didn't want to spend the rest of the day sitting in wet heavy clothes. She found herself next to Gloria and tried to strike up a conversation, with little result. Gloria looked as if she heartily wished she were elsewhere, and Ellen wondered

shrewdly if she were used to a great deal more admiring masculine attention than she was likely to receive in this crowd of relatives.

At last the boat came in with several large sacks full of abalones. All three men, even Manuel, were blue with cold despite the warm sun, and their teeth chattered audibly as they hauled the sacks out of the boat.

"*Madre de Diós*," complained Carlos, shivering, "this northern ocean of yours is colder than a *bruja's* heart. The first couple of dives weren't bad, but then the cold went through my very bones."

"Come over here by the fire, Carlos," Ellen's father suggested.

They had made a long pit in the sand lined with seaweed and had a roaring fire going in it that would soon burn down to the coals on which they would barbeque the abalone and sear the boiled lobster. Rosa and Josefina and the two men from the Morton ranch were cutting the abalone meat from the shells with sharp knives and pounding it tender with rocks. A mound of colorful shells, some of them a foot across, grew beside the cooks and their helpers. The outsides of the shells were rough black or red, often with barnacles and mosses still attached, but the insides were graceful iridescent hollows that flashed multicolored in the sunlight.

"They're the most beautiful shells I've ever seen," Carlos exclaimed excitedly, "more beautiful even than the queen conch of our coasts. Our abalones are small and pale, like large oysters. I'd like to take one home."

"Take all you want, there are more abalone off here than anyone will ever be able to catch," Ellen's father offered expansively. "See the black part of the beach on this cove? From here on north for miles, on past the Jalama, the beach is made of ground up abalone shells. They die, and the tides or storms bring them in and shatter them against the rocks. If you go down to that end of the

cove later on, you'll find that many of the little pieces are still big enough to see the mother of pearl part on one side. But don't go barefoot—that broken shell is sharp."

The trestle table was set up and the wine poured. At intervals down the table were large bowls of fruit: large black cherries, apricots, peaches, and grapes. The men balanced sections of iron grill on either side of the long glowing bed of coals, and at one end Billy's and Gloria's mothers began toasting great stacks of *tortillas* that they piled hot in cloth covered baskets set on wet seaweed at the very end of the fire. Expertly they flipped the thin flat corn pancakes first on one side then on the other, keeping track of eight or ten at a time. Rosa and Josefina dipped the abalone steaks in a rich chili sauce and put them sizzling and spitting on the grill. After five minutes they were turned over and the boiled lobsters, which had been split and cleaned, were placed flat side down next to the steaks, giving off an iodine smell of scorching shell.

Finally everyone, cooks and helpers included, sat down, Rosa said a brief grace, and the feast began. Ellen grinned at the look on Carlos's face when the "servants" sat down with the company. Serve him right, it was time he learned that people who worked for you were people, not cattle. Using knives and fingers, they all wrapped tender juicy pieces of shellfish in the hot *tortillas* and popped them in their mouths. There was garlic butter for the lobster and a fresh peppery *salsa* of onions, tomatoes, and green chilis for the abalone. All of it was washed down with bottle after bottle of light white wine, cool and dry, from the northern vineyards of the Napa Valley. For dessert there were big rounds of creamy Monterey Jack cheese to go with the fruit. They all ate until they were groaning, but there were still platters of abalone and lobster left. No one seemed concerned about the possible waste of so much food, though Ellen knew that whatever was left of her father's share would be given out to the

settlement at Las Cruces. They would kill a few chickens to go with it, have a fiesta, and some of them would arrive late to work the next morning.

Carlos was sitting across the table from her but next to Gloria, who had attached herself to him as the only eligible male in sight. Ellen thought grimly to herself that she had seldom seen him so charming and attentive as he was being to the girl with the flaming hair. In her turn she was smiling at him brilliantly, laughing at his sallies, and occasionally putting a hand on his arm. Both of them were drinking down a fair amount of wine. As the babble around the table grew louder and the laughter more raucous, he took to murmuring in Gloria's ear things that made her blush and giggle. Everyone except Ellen was having too good a time to notice them, but she doggedly went on talking and laughing with Billy and putting down a good deal of wine herself.

When the huge meal was over at last, the older people staggered over to blankets and cushions laid out under some nearby oak trees, where they planned to sleep off their overeating. Carlos, who had changed into the conventional bathing suit brought for him that consisted of pants down to the knees and a shapeless short sleeved tunic that came modestly past his hips, strolled off with Gloria to look at the black shell sand and to investigate tide pools around the point. He made no move to invite Ellen along. She and Billy and Manuel took the boat and rowed off in the opposite direction, where Billy said Manuel knew of a cove with a reef running out from it that pushed up wonderful riding waves.

"But how can I surf in all this?" she wailed, indicating her voluminous bathing costume.

Billy winked at her and grinned, holding up the shorts and shirt Carlos had taken off. "I put them on a rock by the fire before we started eating," he explained. "I really brought them for you in the first place."

She laughed out loud and tossed her head. Let Carlos have that saucy little red-haired baggage—she would have fun in spite of him. She couldn't help wondering with a brief pang, however, if he was telling Gloria about the green mountains and the lush sugar cane valley of his *hacienda*.

The top of the reef was some six feet wide and dished slightly so that sand had collected with small grey-green anemones and bright green tufts of sea grass growing on it. The three of them would stand abreast shoulder deep out at the end of the reef, and as the wave humped up and began to curve over, they flung themselves ahead of it, were lifted to its hanging crest and then tobagganed down in a wild welter of white foaming water that thrust them powerfully at what seemed unbelievable speed for some fifty yards, the water bucking and rolling beneath them like a living thing. Then laughing and holding hands they ran back out the reef, dived through the next one halfway along, and waited once again for a wave that broke just right out at the end. They played in the water until they were exhausted, and afterward laid in the warm sand, talking idly partly in English, partly in Spanish. There were some great white bones nearby that looked like the ribs of a mastadon. Manuel said his father told him that in a byegone time they used to beach whales in the tiny cove sheltered by the reef toward one end and the point at the other, and render the oil from the blubber in huge caldrons right there on the beach.

At last Ellen reluctantly went behind the large boulder again and changed into her bathing costume. They climbed back into the boat and rowed slowly up the coast again, the boys taking turns with the oars. Ellen tied up her wet hair in the matching bandana that went with the costume and hoped that no one would notice. When she changed back into her riding clothes, she could tuck her hair up under her hat.

They beached the boat in time to help with the packing up, and then they used the striped tent again to change. There was still no sign of Carlos and Gloria, and Ellen realized with a start that she hadn't even been thinking of them for some time. Now that their long absence was so apparent, however, she felt betrayed, forgetting entirely the fight she and Carlos had had on the way to the beach. She turned away from piling two *tortilla* baskets in one of the wagons to see Gloria come trailing down the beach with Carlos close behind. Gloria's expression, when they came near enough that Ellen could see it, was sullen, and Carlos was absolutely without expression; his face might have been carved from smooth stone.

By the time the goodbyes had been said and promises to do this more often exchanged, and Carlos and Ellen had saddled and mounted their horses, Ellen had decided on a campaign of silence. He was now being charming and courteous with everyone, including Gloria, whose hand he kissed.

"Latin lovers!" Gloria exclaimed disgustedly, but didn't explain.

They had ridden around the first bend in the creek when he got off *Adiós* and reached down into the water, drawing out a last dripping bottle of white wine. He used the corkscrew on his silver jack knife and drew the cork with a loud pop, handing her the bottle. She looked at him for a moment, then drank deeply, for the salt water had left her thirsty. He in turn tipped it back a long moment, and they continued on their way, trading the bottle back and forth until it was empty. Not a single word passed between them.

When they reached a wide grassy place overhung with giant sycamore trees, he dismounted again.

"Get down!" he demanded.

Relaxed by the wine, she did as he said, and they stood facing each other in the gathering dusk. He deliberately

and slowly reached out and took off her hat. Her damp sandy hair straggled down her back and over her shoulders.

"Would you like to explain how you got your hair wet when your bathing costume was bone dry?" he asked icily.

"I don't have to explain anything to you, any more than you have to explain to me what you were doing for hours with that—that red-headed odalisque. I had no idea you were so interested in shells. At least I had a 'servant' along as chaperone."

"A servant I'm sure who would make himself scarce if asked," he snapped. "You said Morton had a weak chin," he went on accusingly, "which he most certainly doesn't. Why is your hair wet?"

"All right," she retorted, "you asked for it. I changed into the bathing suit you wore to dive for abalone, and we rode waves for part of the afternoon." At the expression of cold fury on his face she added, "I'm sure you don't think ladies ever do things like that, but then as I told you, I don't want to be a lady."

"You certainly don't," he said between clenched teeth. "Why are you goading me like this, Elena? Are you trying to get me to beat you?"

"I didn't ask you to go mooning off with another girl. And I didn't ask you to make love to her right across the table from me, either. All I did was finally get a little enjoyment from an afternoon you did your very best to spoil."

"Make love to that little hussy?" He laughed. "She all but attacked me."

"It took a damned long time to fail!" she snapped.

"Don't swear—" he began pompously.

"Because ladies don't say 'damn'," she broke in. "I'll say what I like!"

It was so dark now that she could hardly see the expression on his face. He took a handful of her damp

hair and pulled her face up to his. "This is how she wanted me to kiss her, Elena. Just like this."

His mouth bruised hers, his brutal kiss itself like a kind of rape. Then his lips softened and his mouth became warm and searching, and a flame flickered through her as he let go her hair, gathering her in his arms.

"Let be, *querida*," he whispered hoarsely. "For the love of God stop fighting me at every turn. Lady or not, you're everything there is to me."

She clung tightly to him, trembling with awakened desire as the first edge of the moon rose over the ridge behind him until it shone orange on her upturned face. Carlos was all too right, that once they kissed they would not stop.

3

"Are you out of your mind? I'm not going to have any daughter of mine marrying a greaser and going off to God knows where!"

Ellen's eyes looked almost black in her white face. "So he came to you..." Oh Papa, she thought despairingly, if I could only tell you...

"Yes, he came to me. Ellen, you're old enough by now to know better than to lead a grown man on. I told him he must have misunderstood you, and even if he hadn't, that it was out of the question." George Kirby's voice was shaking with rage, his eyes blue ice. Ellen had never seen him so angry. "What I really wanted to do was punch him in the nose!"

"You might have gotten a surprise, Papa," Ellen said quietly. "If he can swim and ride as well as that, someone might have taught him to fight, too." She waited, hoping her father's anger would burn itself out.

"You don't really think you're going to marry him?" Kirby asked incredulously.

"Yes, Papa, I am." Her voice was still quiet.

"Ellen, listen to me," her father said desperately. "Do you have any idea how that crew down at the crossroads treat their wives? They use their pay to get drunk and then come home and beat them."

Ellen laughed. "Papa, I know far more about 'that crew', as you put it, at the crossroads than you do. Most of them can't even read or write, and to compare them to Carlos is like comparing an ignorant saddle bum to you. You'll have to do better than that. Is your objection that he's a Mexican?"

Her father's head moved back and forth with the effort of trying to be eloquent, like that of a grizzly trying to see an invisible tormentor. "I'll be honest with you, Ellen," he said at last, "I don't know for sure. I don't like his being a Mex to begin with—they're different from us. I don't like you thinking of going so far away where I couldn't help you if you needed it. And he's too smooth, too dandified. I just don't trust him. He's good enough company all right, and I can see how he'd turn your head, but he's not our kind of people, that's all."

"As far as being smooth and dandified, he can outride and outswim Billy Morton, whom you like so much. I fail to see that his good manners are anything but in his favor. It isn't as if I'd be going somewhere where I didn't know the language, and their mail system is supposed to be pretty good. They say Diaz has wiped out banditry, so I don't know what trouble I'd be getting into that you would have to rescue me from. Face it, Papa, you don't want me to marry Carlos because you don't want to lose me. I'll have to go sometime, and I'll be making trips to see you from time to time. Please, Papa, give us your blessing. You're the only family I have besides Rosa."

George Kirby's face hardened. "My blessing you shall not have. I can't lock you in your room, and I know you'll go off and do what you want no matter what I say, but I

won't connive at this foolishness and I won't give you any written permission. You still being a minor, that means you can't get married in this state anyway unless you lie about your age. That'll be a great way to begin a marriage, won't it, with a lie."

Ellen lifted her head. "I'm going with him, Papa, with or without your consent. I love Carlos and I want to marry him and bear his children. I love you, too, but you're the one making me choose between you, not I."

"If I'd only known, I'd never have signed that agreement to ship those animals. I notice he waited until I'd taken his draft to tell me he'd been sneaking around my daughter."

"Papa, you're not being fair," Ellen pleaded. "He wanted to tell you two weeks ago, but I wouldn't let him. I knew how you'd take it, and I thought—I was silly enough to think that if you saw more of him you wouldn't be so angry."

"Two weeks ago! You hadn't known him for more than a day or so then. Ellen, you're mad to do this thing."

"Two weeks, two months, two *years* wouldn't change my mind. If I thought it would, I'd wait."

"Very well." Her father's eyes narrowed and he looked older. "Just don't plan on coming crawling back here when it doesn't work out. You go along with him, girl, and have your little greasers with him, but count me out." He turned on his heel and walked out of the room, not even bothering to slam the door.

"Ah Rosa," she said later in the kitchen, "it was worse than I thought. He was so hurt and angry that he wouldn't even talk thinks over rationally. In my whole life I never heard him use any mean term for a Mexican, and yet now it's 'Mex' and 'greaser' every other sentence. What's gotten into him?"

"He's afraid, Ellen. He's so afraid of being left all alone that he's shaking with it. It's plain old fear that's making

him talk like that." Rosa sighed and dried her hands on a towel. "I saw it all coming when your Carlos first walked in the house. He's like an exotic flower: beautiful, irresistible. He's not one to take no for an answer."

"But Papa would have lost me to Billy Morton."

"Not really. He always had it in mind to join the ranches, and before you'd known it you both would have been living here with him. He had it all figured out."

"That's the most selfish thing I ever heard of." Ellen was shocked.

Rosa's face softened. "Ellen, you were just a baby, and of course you don't know what happened to him when your mother died. She died hard, Ellen, with a lot of blood, and I thought your papa would lose his mind. He blamed himself for getting her pregnant, and for a whole day he wouldn't even let me near her to wash her and lay her out. Afterward I came on him one night sitting at that desk in there with his books, and he had a gun in his hand. I brought him something to drink, though he was already drunk, but this drink had herbs I know in it that put him to sleep. For months I put some of the medicine in his food or drink, and he went around as if he were a little sleepy, but he didn't take out the gun anymore. I hoped he would marry again, but he never did. All that tied-up love, Ellen, he has put in you, and now he thinks you are deserting him. To him it's almost as if your mother was leaving him again."

"Because I look like her is the main reason he loves me," Ellen said stonily.

"That's not true, Ellen," Rosa said, kneading down the risen bread dough she had taken from the warm oven. "He really does love you as you, but it's not right to put so much on a child that belongs better with a wife. He's only forty-seven years old, he has plenty of time to marry again. And if you're gone, I think that's what he'll do."

"Papa marry again? Rosa, you must be joking." Ellen

felt unaccountably resentful. "Of course he won't marry again after all this time."

"Ellen, Ellen," Rosa laughed. "Sometimes you are so like your papa it's hard to choose between you. You both want to put each other in amber, like that butterfly your papa brought back from San Francisco, so that you neither one of you will ever change. Unless you're going to stay here all your life an old maid, you will change and he will change, and it's high time for both of you."

"You think he'll forgive me one day?"

Rosa hugged her. "Of course he'll forgive you. He feels terrible now, but all that love will have to go somewhere, and I'd be surprised if he didn't start making trips to Santa Barbara pretty soon to look over the mares."

Ellen giggled. "You do call a spade a spade, don't you? But now what am I supposed to do? Carlos went off to Santa Barbara after we put the animals on the train at Gaviota, and I'm left sitting here with a furious father, not knowing what's going to happen. He didn't even tell me he'd told Papa."

"I'm not sure he had a chance to. You didn't go to Gaviota, and I know he didn't want to come back here. I saw him on the way to the barn to saddle his horse, and he looked as if he was ready to chew nails. He told me someone would be after his trunk later on. I think that when that someone comes, he'll have a message for you."

"I hope you're right. Oh Rosa, would you consider coming with us? What am I going to do without you?"

"You'll do just fine," Rosa said calmly, putting the kneaded dough back in the warming oven. "You have your Carlos, but your papa doesn't have anybody. Besides, I can't leave the people at Las Cruces who need me. Before you go, I'll give you some herbs from here that my mother said they don't have in Mexico. Some here call me a *bruja*, a witch, and perhaps they're right. I only know that when I sometimes feel that something will happen, it

happens. You must treat the poor people with herbs and what I've taught you, Ellen. I don't know why, but my feeling says it's very important. You must treat them and make them your friends, or something terrible will happen to you."

It was afternoon when a buggy appeared coming from Las Cruces. The Mexican driving it said he was to take the señor's trunk and the señor's *novia* as well if she would come. She had Joe hitch a fresh horse to the buggy, promising to send it back the next day. He asked her if she didn't want to take her mare, Sally, but she shook her head. "Breed her to that new black stud over at the Stephens ranch," she said, "and turn her out to pasture. She'll throw a nice foal." Joe nodded, biting his lip. Rosa hugged her, wishing her "*Vaya con Diós*," go with God. There was no sign of her father. Her eyes blurred with tears as she said goodbye to everything she had ever known, the golden hills with their dark green oak trees, the horses, Rosa and Joe, and her father. She wanted to break down and bawl, but controlled herself, and before long they were on the highway and on their way through the great slabs of rock lining the pass that led out to the coast.

It was nearing ten o'clock that night when they finally reached the Santiago Hotel, a large rambling place right on the beach. She was a little frightened, wondering what she should do if Carlos wasn't there, but as she entered the lobby, he sprang up from a chair, threw his cigar in a potted palm, and gathered her in his arms.

"Sorry about the accommodations," he said, "but I didn't want to pick a fashionable hotel here in case we ran into friends of your father. Poor thing, you must be starved."

Like magic he made people appear from nowhere, and before she knew it, she was ensconced in a living room-

bedroom suite, her clothes hung up, a fire going in the fireplace, a bottle of champagne open in a bucket of ice, and herself and Carlos sitting across from each other at a small table waiting for dinner to be brought up to them.

He raised his glass of champagne. "To us, *querida*, to our love and to our children and to our long life together."

When she told him of her father's attitude, he patted her hand comfortingly "I agree with your father that our marriage must not begin with a lie. We will simply get married when we reach Mexico; no one will be able to argue with that. Cheer up, Elena, our life together will be so long and so joyful that we will never rue missing these few days."

"Missing?" Ellen was puzzled.

"I'm not going to make love to you until we are husband and wife," he pronounced a bit pompously.

"But you already have."

"And they say women are romantics! We'll forget about that as if it never happened."

"I don't want to forget about it," she persisted stubbornly. "Why would I wish to forget so marvellous an occurrence? Do you really want to pretend it never happened?"

He stiffened, his eyes suddenly unfriendly. "You must forget it, as I have. I was out of my mind to have taken advantage of you like that. All ladies are virgins on their wedding nights."

Ellen got a dangerous look in her eye. "Carlos, I'm warning you, you've got to stop trying to make me into someone else. I'm glad you made love to me, it was the most wonderful experience I've ever had, and I expect to remember it when I'm eighty."

"Stop talking like a whore!"

"Is making love then so evil, is it only the act of a prostitute? Don't ladies make love? Ah yes, they must make love in order to have children, mustn't they? Then

it's that ladies mustn't *enjoy* making love, is that it?"

They sat silently glaring at each other as the waiter wheeled in their dinner, another bottle of champagne, and a bottle of cognac. Then he whipped out a florist's box of yellow roses that he arranged in a vase and a corsage of tiny white orchids, which he handed Carlos to pin on her.

"When you wish dessert, sir, just ring," the waiter said as he departed.

Ellen's eyes had softened. "Oh Carlos, let's stop this silly bickering and enjoy ourselves. The flowers are lovely, darling—I never dreamed of ever being courted so elegantly. I thought it only happened in books." She took his hand impulsively and kissed it.

He smiled at her quite fatuously. "Ladies aren't supposed to kiss gentlemen's hands."

She laughed. "So much the worse for them."

Suddenly feeling very hungry, they both ate the roast duck greedily, washing it down with the second bottle of champagne. Dessert turned out to be flaming crêpes Suzette, and Ellen gave a little cry of delight as the waiter set the dish alight.

"I've never had them before!" she exclaimed happily, and Carlos's smile became even more fatuous.

"Would you rather have something other than brandy?" he asked.

"No thank you, I hate sweet liqueurs."

"You would, wouldn't you?" He grinned at her.

Carlos signed the bill and handed the waiter an extra tip. "That will be all, thank you."

"Very good, sir. Thank you sir." The waiter wheeled the ruins of their meals out into the corridor and quietly closed the door.

"Would you mind if I smoked?" Carlos asked.

"Not at all, as long as you let me have a puff or two."

His look of dismay was comical. "You're joking, of course," but his voice had an uncertain ring.

"Not at all. My father used to let me have a puff or so before he got the end all wet and chewed. And for heaven's sake don't tell me ladies don't smoke—I'm perfectly well aware of it."

He began to protest, thought better of it, and laughed instead. The champagne and brandy were having their effect on both of them.

"Havana," she said approvingly as she drew on the cigar and blew an expert smoke ring. "I tell you what, let's pretend I'm your mistress instead of your fiancée." She handed the cigar back to him. "What would you do?"

The cigar end glowed red, then he put it down on the ashtray, got up out of his chair, and went round to her. He took her face in both his hands. "This is what I would do," he said, kissing her as he had on their ride home from the beach. As they broke apart a little breathlessly, "No, that's not right. This is just the *beginning* of what I would do," he corrected himself and bent down to kiss her again.

Later on she remembered that the only other thing he said besides incoherent endearments in Spanish was, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair."

She always thought of that night as her wedding night.

At seven the next morning Ellen came up out of a deep sleep at the insistent ringing of the room telephone. Her mouth felt dry and her stomach churned unpleasantly. A disembodied arm reached over her and picked up the receiver.

"Please bring breakfast in forty-five minutes," Carlos said alertly as if he had been awake for hours, but she noticed he dropped the phone on its hook rather than replacing it carefully.

"How can you think about breakfast?" She shuddered.

"Um," he answered, burrowing his face in the back of her neck and tightening his arm across her breasts.

"I can't even think about that," she groaned.

He didn't bother to answer this time but went on with

what he was doing, and before long it was the hangover she wasn't thinking about.

When breakfast arrived, Carlos was taking his bath, and she found to her surprise that she was hungry. After breakfast she took her bath while he shaved. There seemed to be a lack of self-consciousness between them that she found miraculous. If this was what making love did for you, how nice, she thought.

"Carlos?"

"Hmm."

"What happens next?"

"We catch a train at 8:30 for Los Angeles, and then we catch another train for Tucson, and then we catch a third train for Nogales, and then we catch a fourth train for Mazatlán where I have some business, and then we catch a fifth train for Tepic, and then we go horseback to Guadalajara and meet a lot of relatives, and then we go horseback to the *hacienda*."

"When are we going to get married?"

"In Nogales. Damn! I cut myself."

"You swear in English, how odd." She watched as he made another wide swath down through the shaving soap on his face with his silver-handled straight razor.

"It's impossible to swear mildly in Spanish."

"What about *caráy* and *hijole*?"

"They don't even count as swearing. It's like saying 'darn' or 'my goodness' in English. How do you know about *caráy* and *hijole*?"

"California has plenty of Mexicans, I could hardly have missed hearing them."

"When we get to the *hacienda*, I'll have the school-teacher teach you Spanish, it will make your life there much more pleasant."

Ellen smiled to herself. Let him go on thinking for a while she knew no Spanish. "I thought reading and writing wasn't for workers."

"Oh, we bring along a few of them we plan to make gang foremen and household help," he said carelessly. "Tomás has been after me to have all the children taught, but I'm not convinced."

Carlos went early to check on the train accommodations for his horse, and Ellen followed with the baggage. She hadn't taken much with her in the flurry and upset of leaving so suddenly. They settled themselves in their compartment, and the train started with a jerk that was only the beginning of an endless series of jerks, of heat, of cinders and dust and grit. In Los Angeles Carlos took her on a whirlwind shopping spree in the downtown stores. He bought her riding outfits, ball gowns, afternoon gowns, morning gowns, negligees, a whole trousseau of more clothes than she had ever seen in her life before. She even tried on a succession of frivolous large flowered hats.

Carlos would sit on a chair turned backward, resting his chin on his hands crossed across the top of the chair, and give judgments in a clipped decisive tone on the various dresses she paraded before him. At last she balked at trying on one more piece of clothing.

"I don't care if you jilt me, Carlos, I will not put on one more stitch."

He smiled at the saleswoman and shrugged. "What can one do?"

The saleslady, an older woman of experience who had entered the proceedings when it became apparent that customers with money were in the offing, said almost enviously, "The trouble is that madame's figure and hair make nearly every dress she puts on look grand."

Carlos looked maddeningly smug, and Ellen knew that he would probably slip the woman a generous tip. She was tired now, but it had been more fun than she had thought possible to be able to say, not that she would prefer this dress over those, but that she would take all three of them. Gloves, hats, shoes, lingerie, whatever she

desired she had only to mention and he immediately bought them for her. He wanted to buy her a side-saddle, but she insisted she wouldn't ride it.

"I'm surprised at you, Carlos, as good a horseman as you are. A sidesaddle is bad for the horse and dangerous besides."

She also turned down a saddle covered with silver. "It's heavy and one more thing to polish," she announced. "I like that one better," pointing to a saddle of tooled leather with a low cantle. "Now all I need is a horse."

"I was going to make it a surprise, *querida*," he said, "but since you ask, I'd better show her to you."

They drove grandly in a hired automobile with chauffeur to the stables next to the railroad station. In one box stall was Adíos, who nickered softly when he recognized Carlos, and in the next stall a white mare with the small ears, arched neck, dainty legs, and high rump that proclaimed her Arab breeding.

"Carlos, how nice of you!" Ellen breathed. "She's beautiful!" She stroked the satiny neck. "I can't wait to try her."

"That's why I didn't want to tell you right away. It's getting dark now, and at nine tonight the train leaves for Tucson. We'll be travelling at night to avoid the heat. The desert between here and there is a scorcher this time of year."

So off they went again. The berths seemed too narrow for sleeping together, so she opted for the upper one, feeling wifely and virtuous for allowing him the window. Excited by the click of the wheels on the rails, the clanging of the couplings, and the occasional lonely wail of the locomotive whistle, she lay awake for a long time. At last she leaned down and saw that Carlos, also awake, was looking through the curtains at the moonlit scene outside. She climbed silently down and got into bed beside him.

"It's lonely up there."

"It was lonely down here, too, *querida*. I'm glad you came."

They fell asleep in each other's arms while outside the vast empty landscape lit by the cold light of a waning moon flowed by the window beside them as the train fled through the desert night.

At Tucson, a sun-struck baking little town of adobe and wooden walls too hot to touch, they caught a feeder train to Nogales, where they found that the best hotel on either side of the border was dismal, grubby, and hot, with the water running warm and rusty from the tap. That night they slept as far away from each other as they could get because of the heat. Ellen got up in the middle of the night and wetted herself down with a cloth dipped in water. When she came back to the bed, she saw Carlos was awake. Without saying anything, she got the cloth and wetted him down, too. He sighed, smiled at her, and fell asleep, but she lay awake for a long time again, more than a little frightened at the unknown future that he seemed to take so for granted.

The next morning they set out to stir up officialdom on the Sonora side of the border to arrange their marriage. Every once in a while, Ellen found herself in awe of Carlos, who was capable of managing the most complicated of matters with a deftness that left her shaking her head in admiration. He seemed instinctively to know who to lord it over, whose palm to cross with how much silver, and who to be friendly with in a man-to-man way that included the changing hands of a bottle of brandy. She had woken pale and exhausted, and as the morning dragged on, going from official to official, she wondered several times if she was going to pass out. It seemed that it would be the mayor who would actually marry them, and he often didn't turn up until around eleven or noon because he had a flourishing feed business in town that took up much more of his time than did his official position. A

long document was typed on a rickety machine, and various stamps were affixed to it.

At last the mayor appeared, a small bald man with a lot of gold in his teeth. He motioned them into his office.

"So you want to get married, do you?" he said to Carlos in Spanish. "Does the *señorita* speak our language?"

When Carlos said no, he poked him suggestively and winked. "I've heard there's nothing like cool-looking northern blondes, eh?" He brought out a bottle of brandy and three grimy glasses. The brandy was warm and smelled of shellac, probably made in somebody's cellar. The mayor then proceeded to launch into some of the dirtiest jokes Ellen had ever heard, even among the lowest ranch hands, after each one laughing wheezily and clapping Carlos on the back.

"The *señorita* doesn't feel very well, the heat you know," Carlos broke in finally. "Shall we get on with the wedding?"

"Of course, of course," the mayor beamed, and with a flourish he signed the document and the copies, clapped Carlos on the shoulder again, and bowed them out of the office.

"What's happening?" Ellen asked. "I thought he was going to marry us."

"He did," Carlos replied, surprised.

"What do you mean, he did? All he did was sign that paper." She was indignant. Going through a little ceremony in that dirty, fly-specked office wasn't her idea of an ideal way to marry anyone, but she had really looked forward to telling Carlos that she would love, honor and obey him till death did them part.

"What else was he supposed to do? In my country, the only ceremony is in the church. It's wise to go through all this for the marriage to be legally registered, though many don't bother, but all the vows are said in the church."

"Can't we go to a church here?"

"No," he explained reasonably, "because you are not a Catholic. It will be necessary for you to become a convert to the Catholic Church before we can be married in the church."

"And if I don't want to become a Catholic?"

"You don't have to unless you want a church ceremony. Of course, the children will have to be raised Catholics."

She thought momentarily of proposing that she pretend to be Catholic just for now, but remembered her father's cut about building their marriage on a lie and kept silent. She was beginning to see that even though there was a Mexican flavor to life in California, she was in for a number of shocks before her life settled down into some semblance of order. She shivered even in the intense heat.

"Thank God there is a train out of here to Mazatlán this evening so that we can travel the worst stretch, to Guaymas, at night."

As it happened, the train, a decrepit collection of old rolling stock that must have dated back to the American Civil War, took the better part of twenty-four hours to reach Guaymas because of washouts between Hermosillo and Guaymas. Not only that, but it stopped at every small town, including places out in the middle of scrub desert where there didn't even seem to be buildings. Bad though the heat was when they were moving, when they stopped it became unbearable. There were no berths and only the most primitive of bathrooms whose toilets no longer worked, so everyone slept sitting up. When the train stopped in uninhabited areas, the women passengers went on one side and the men on the other. The time passed in a haze of heat and exhaustion until Ellen really wondered if she were a little delirious. She felt as if she had been on that train all her life.

"If this is any example of the Mexican railway system, I'm almost sorry we didn't ride. Are the horses all right in the heat?"

"They're probably better off than we are. The boxcar doors are open, and I've a man laid on to walk them around whenever we stop. It was bad luck that the first class train is stranded in Tepic because of a bridge wash-out. When we get to Mazatlán, I intend to wait until we can do better. I have friends there, and we'll be comfortable."

Guaymas was somewhat cooler, though the heat was wet. Ellen had a memory afterward of a spectacular sunset over a harbor and a steel blue bay with sailing and steam ships anchored there. The town itself, a collection of white adobe houses with tile roofs and stick shacks with thatch roofs, climbed up a steep hillside, the poorer houses being higher up.

"Why aren't the nice houses up where there's a view? The harbor and bay must be a marvellous sight from up there."

"Water," Carlos replied. "The town wells are all low down, and the only water those poor people get, they have to carry up that hill. I doubt that by the time you've lugged twenty liters of water up that slope you would care what the view was. You'll see the same pattern in most Mexican towns where there are hills."

The nightmare trip went on, taking three days and innumerable delays to pass Navajoa, Los Mochis, and Culiacán. Even Carlos was looking wilted, and Ellen's cup of misery ran over when she got her period right in the midst of it all. She never suffered pain, but the logistics of cleanliness ranged from difficult to impossible. Carlos had become distant, retreating to another world of some kind where neither the train nor herself existed. Ordinarily such hardships would have engendered a certain *camaraderie* among the passengers, but they were all so heat struck that they could only sit in silent, pale-faced misery with no more strength left than simply to endure. Even the children on the train stopped crying finally, their wails reduced to occasional weary whimpers. Someone said

that a baby had died in another car, and Ellen could believe it.

At last, after endless miles of going up one hill and down the other side only to face another hill covered with green, scrubby, bushlike trees, they pulled into the tiny station at Mazatlán, a sleepy little seaside village surrounded by coconut palms, and beyond them the endless brush covered hills. There was one fairly decent hotel in town that faced out on the *malecón* and the sea, a marvelous sapphire blue. Their room had a balcony that overlooked the ocean, and Ellen took the most wonderful bath she had ever had while Carlos arranged for the stabling of the horses and the storing of their trunks. He sent a boy horseback out to the *hacienda* owned by his friend, and then himself disappeared into the bathroom for nearly an hour. Unbelievably weary, they fell onto the bed, made up with only a sheet for cover, and slept hard until nine.

"It isn't too late to get dinner?" Ellen asked anxiously. On the hated train they had eaten what little their appetites demanded from roadside vendors who seemed to materialize from nowhere, selling greasy *tacos* and *tostadas* and *pan dulces* and sweets crawling with flies.

"Actually, we're a little early to be fashionable. They go by Spanish eating hours here."

Still stunned by the trip, they ate their oysters and red snapper in silence, savoring each bite but at the same time thinking longingly of the bed upstairs. The dining room was large and deserted, featuring a huge wrought iron chandelier ablaze with candles, and fancy kerosene lamps in brackets around the wall. After a *flan* of rich custard covered with melted caramel, they finished their coffee and brandy and climbed wearily back up the ornate tiled stairs. Still in silence, they undressed and made ready for bed. Though better by far than the train, the heat was nonetheless oppressive, and Ellen got into bed naked with only the sheet over her.

"Just what do you think you're doing?" It was Carlos at his coldest, what she had already labelled his imperious *hacendado* voice.

"What do you mean?" She was genuinely puzzled.

"Where are all the nightgowns I bought you?"

"For heaven's sake, Carlos, why should I wear a nightgown in all this heat? As soon as the light is out, I intend to remove even the sheet."

"Have you no modesty at all? How am I going to explain to my sister in Guadalajara that you sleep naked like a whore? Not even the poor Indian women do that."

"Carlos, I'm too tired to argue with you, and I'm not going to get up and rummage around for a nightgown. All right, so I'm a whore, though you didn't seem to think so when you married me. Now turn out the light and go to sleep." She turned over with her back toward his side of the bed and closed her eyes.

His disapproval was thick in the air, but he blew out the lamps, took off his robe, and got into bed, in his turn putting his back toward her. To her intense annoyance, she had never felt more wide awake. She could tell from his breathing he was awake, too. Prig, she thought; it was as if crossing the border into Mexico had intensified every aspect of him that had given her pause. That he had been so distant during the trip she had put down to the heat and discomfort, but now she wondered. She had slept naked that wonderful night in Santa Barbara and he hadn't complained, nor had he said anything the hot night in Nogales when she sponged him down. Since the train trip to Tucson he hadn't touched her, nor even spoken any more than necessary. Was he already regretting having married her?

"Carlos!" she whispered impulsively. "Are you awake?"

Though she knew he was, he pretended to be asleep and refused to answer her.

4

The horses' hoofs made no sound on the damp earth as they walked across a seemingly endless flat carpet of green plain broken only by occasional low rolling hills. After the tortuous ups and downs of the barrancas, this flatness was a relief. For three days coming up from Tepic the road had climbed steeply in sharp switchbacks up one ridge, descending equally steeply into little fertile valleys thick with growing corn, only to ascend abruptly once more to the next ridge. On some of the hillsides the corn was planted in places so steep it would have been difficult for a man to stand upright. In the distance Ellen could see a great towering thunderhead boiling up into the blue sky, but where they were, the sun was warm on their backs. Frequently they passed mule and horse drawn wagons going both ways, and occasionally long strings of heavily laden burros. A stage came galloping by from the opposite direction, throwing up large clods of damp earth.

At Mazatlán there had been a few extra cars from the

luxury train sidetracked, and these were hitched to an engine that took them as far as the slide, really a river of mud, that had closed the railroad near Tuxpán. Wagons met the abbreviated train, and everything was carried across the slimy barrier, then put on barges to be poled across the swollen San Pedro River that had taken out the railroad bridge. On the other side of the river there waited the first class train that finally backed its way to Tepic, chuffing up the steep mountainsides through pines and low brush. As the train climbed, the passengers could feel the heat lessen its moist weight, and as they dined in comparative luxury, they revelled in the lowering temperature.

Though it was now only early September, Carlos's *hacienda* friends near Mazatlán had already left for Mexico City to take part in the grand *fiestas* to celebrate the centenary of Mexico's independence from Spain on the sixteenth of September and the eightieth birthday of Porfirio Díaz, who had ruled Mexico for more than thirty years. The year 1910 was an exciting milestone in Mexican history, and Mexico City had gone wild with the celebrating of it. Carlos had looked at her consideringly and asked her if she would like to go.

"I really feel that I ought to settle into your *hacienda* life before I go off to celebrations hundreds of miles away. Besides," she added honestly, "I've had enough travelling to last me for a long, long time."

"Just as well. Díaz did much for Mexico, but he doesn't know when to quit. Everything is being run now by a group of greedy senile old men—it's time they let somebody younger have a try at it."

Now he was saying as they broke the horses into a canter, "It won't be long before we're in Guadalajara. This is the last group of hills and then some farmland and the city."

Sure enough, in little over an hour they could see the

twin spires of the cathedral rising up out of the rooftops of the city, and by the middle of the afternoon they were clattering over the cobblestones of the city streets and pulling up before a large house set back a bit from the street in what was obviously a rich residential district. The road was lined with large jacaranda trees that must have been a gorgeous blaze of purple in the spring. Signing to her to get down and hold the horses, Carlos went up to the door and pulled a big iron ring that was apparently attached to a bell inside. The house appeared more European than Mexican, a huge square pile of masonry with lots of elaborately carved stonework on corners and ledges.

The door was opened by a slender woman with sleek black hair drawn back tight in a fashionable knot at the back of her head. "Carlos! When your baggage arrived, we were overjoyed. And what was that in your note about a wife? I thought we were misreading, your handwriting was always so bad. Let me—" She broke off as in the midst of her embrace she took in Ellen, weary, travel-stained, and disheveled in her riding clothes, wisps of hair trailing out from under her hat, holding their horses like a servant.

"Margarita, this is Elena, my wife," he replied, also in Spanish.

"Oh Carlos, how could you!" Margarita wailed. "Salvador and I were married by Tío Juan Alfonso, and you should have been, too. And a *gringa* at that . . . I'll never know why you Mexican men are so enamored of fair hair and white skins, though her skin doesn't look very white at the moment."

"Now, Margarita, be reasonable. There was no one to chaperone her down here, and naturally it was her father's right to give the wedding. We were married in Santa Barbara, and just to be sure, I also got a Mexican civil marriage certificate in Nogales." He turned to Ellen.

"This is my sister Margarita, Elena," he said in English. "You must understand that it's been a shock to her to find me so suddenly married." Then he turned back to Margarita. "Well, aren't you going to invite us in, or should we go to a hotel?" His chilly voice said plainly that he expected no further protests from her.

Her manner immediately became so meek and demure that Ellen wondered if she had dreamed the angry, determined woman who had answered the door. She changed her opinion yet once again when she saw that they had been placed in separate rooms with a dressing room and bath between. Her dresses had been pressed and hung up—so much for Margarita's "surprise"—and in his room Carlos's clothes had similarly been freshened and put away. Margarita was obviously going to keep them as far apart as she could, and Ellen felt fortunate that they hadn't been put on opposite sides of the house.

"Oh Carlos," she said when they were alone, "does this mean that we're really meant to sleep in separate rooms?"

He looked at her as if he had never seen her before. "Of course. You didn't think we would go on sleeping in the same bed for the rest of our lives, did you?" At her expression of dismay, he went on, "Come, come, Elena, the honeymoon's over. It's time to begin to take up our everyday lives again."

"Honeymoon!" she gasped. "You have the nerve to call that horror of a journey a honeymoon? You haven't so much as touched me since the trip to Tucson. I'm beginning to think that Gloria was the lucky one."

"Stop acting like a spoiled child. I haven't time to argue with you, so do as I say. I've got business to transact this afternoon, but I'll be back by eight. We dress for dinner here, by the way." He led her firmly to her room and closed the connecting door. For quite a while she could hear water running, but she was too angry to wonder what he was doing.

As it happened, he was back long before eight. She had been dozing fitfully when she came awake with a start to realize the water was running again, then silence. Her door didn't open, and she supposed he was taking the opportunity to sleep as she had. Well, let him! She had a dismaying view of a bleak future in which Carlos, her only link with a longed-for past, had turned into a hostile stranger. What did he want her to become? She had the feeling that he had compared her unfairly to his sister: herself dirty, unkempt, roughly dressed, and Margarita a feminine version of Carlos, slim, sleek, elegant. Margarita would have come through such a trip without a hair out of place, arriving sidesaddle in a smart riding costume at that. How could anyone compete with that, and especially anyone like herself, who along with her impulsiveness and generosity of spirit had also a personal carelessness that hardly showed her always in a flattering light?

Carlos had wanted to be proud of her, and yet there he was at his sister's door with a bedraggled urchin he was forced to introduce as his wife. But why hadn't he said something that morning? He had plenty of money; they could have taken a hotel room, changed their clothes, and arrived at his sister's fresh and rested. She realized that he hadn't even thought how she looked. What had happened to the impetuous skillful lover of that night in Santa Barbara, the lover who had taken such pleasure in buying her beautiful clothes? "Beautiful clothes for a beautiful woman," he had said, making love to her with his eyes and voice right there in the middle of the most expensive department store in Los Angeles.

She shook her head and looked at the watch on a pin, to be carried fastened to a dress, that he had bought her in Los Angeles. It was seven already. Part of the long lonely afternoon she had spent on herself, bathing with the expensive-smelling bath oil she found in the bathroom, washing and drying her hair, doing her nails, plucking her

eyebrows, all of the myriad little attentions that she had let slide during that ghastly journey. She was sitting in her petticoats when there was a timid knock on the door to the hallway.

"Who is it?" she asked in Spanish.

"I am Lupita, I've come to help you with dressing," a shy little voice answered.

Ellen opened the door to find a child standing outside. "I am fifteen," Lupita announced proudly later on, but on that first glance Ellen guessed her age at twelve. Though she was perfectly capable of doing her own hair and putting on her own dress, she felt sorry for the child. "Yes, I would like some help, Lupita. Thank you."

Chattering away, they went through the dresses and finally settled on one of an iridescent hue, blue shot with green.

"Isn't it perhaps too dressy?" Ellen asked, knowing that child or not, Lupita knew better than she what people wore here.

"Oh no, *señora*," Lupita said seriously. "There will be many guests tonight, and you should look your best."

Ellen's expression was grim. No one had bothered to tell her about any guests; she had thought this first night would be a simple family dinner. Carlos must have known by the time he came in, yet he hadn't come near her. To give Carlos his due, men usually didn't take such an interest in clothes as women did, nor were they judged as harshly for the wrong ones, either. He had at least warned her to dress for dinner. No, it was Margarita who had engineered this pitfall specifically for Ellen's benefit, if you could call it that. She could always say later that she thought Ellen knew. Ellen's eyes narrowed. I'll show them that I'm not a complete barbarian, she thought. She blessed the Los Angeles shopping spree and even that boring Pasadena finishing school that had pounded manners and French into her, though she had never thought

either would ever prove particularly useful in the life she had envisioned for herself.

She put on the dress, and Lupita fastened it up for her. Then with a towel pinned over Ellen's shoulders, Lupita combed and brushed out the long blonde hair until it was a smooth fall of shining gold. Lupita braided it and wrapped it in a thick golden crown around her head. The child considered the reflection in the mirror critically, saying, "*Un momento*," left and came back minutes later with a tiny jar of something pink. She brushed the end of her little finger in the pink salve and lightly wiped it over Ellen's cheekbones until it was all but invisible. She repeated the process with her lips. The light tan Ellen had gotten during the ride from Tepic no longer looked sallow but became a golden bloom against the faintest hint of color on her cheeks and lips. Her eyes shone from her naturally dark lashes as green as the depths of the sea. She smiled at Lupita with gratitude, and the child gave her a conspiratorial grin in return.

"Elena! Are you ready?" It was Carlos calling impatiently through the connecting door.

"Come in," Ellen said, and taking the towel from her shoulders, she turned to face him.

He stood for a moment as if turned to stone, and she was afraid he would make some disapproving remark. Above the snowy ruffles of his shirt front his face took on a delighted smile, and he picked up her hand and kissed it lingeringly. "I'd almost forgotten how beautiful you could be," he said in a wondering voice.

"Then perhaps it's as well for you to see me disheveled every once in a while," she replied tartly, "so that you don't forget to notice me when I'm beautifully dressed. In fact, perhaps we should make that train trip an annual affair?" she added cruelly.

He looked at her then with an amused smile. "Don't fight with me tonight, Elena. You couldn't make me angry now if you tried." He tucked her hand under his arm and

patted it affectionately. "I've got something for you."

He led her into his room and gave her a long slender box. Puzzled, she opened it, to find a necklace, pendent earrings, and bracelet of clear sparkling aquamarine in antique settings. "Carlos! How lovely!" She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on the mouth. His arms tightened around her, and his mouth momentarily became insistent.

"Don't do that," he said at last, "or we'll be late for the party. These belonged to my mother. When I saw that dress, I knew you had to wear them with it." He kissed her again gently. "Come, my sweet. It won't matter if everyone speaks French or Spanish, they have only to look at you to be smitten by your beauty, you won't have to say a word."

"Yes, Carlos," she replied meekly, and no one looking at her face would have guessed that there was an exultant grin going on inside it.

They came down the stairway to find that quite a few of the guests had already arrived.

"Carlos!" a short plump man with a humorous good natured face exclaimed delightedly. "Carlos, *hermano mío*, how are you? How was your trip? Successful? Is this the bride? Ravishing! My dear, your Nordic beauty pales our southern ladies to insignificance." He kissed her hand. "Edmundo Alvarez Escobar y Mendoza at your service."

"You flatter me, *señor*," she answered. "How thoughtful of Carlos, though, to have such a discerning brother." She smiled broadly at him, liking him immediately.

"My God, Carlos, how did you do it? To find a beautiful lady with a sense of humor besides. Elena, you're wasted on him. Would that I, who could really appreciate you, had seen you first. Come with me, my dear, and I'll pick out the people who are of some interest. Carlos will only bog himself down in boring discussions of politics and cattle."

Edmundo took her on a whirlwind tour of the room, seemingly introducing her to this one or that one by chance, but she noticed that he had skillfully picked out only those who spoke English, and he had unerringly in his remarks identified them indelibly in her mind as he engaged in a constant stream of witty repartee. This one was a banker, that one a *hacendado* like Carlos, the other a Frenchman and his wife travelling in Mexico. She noticed that far fewer of the ladies spoke English than the men, and she wondered if they spoke French like Margarita, or only Spanish. She also noticed that Margarita kept well out of her way.

There was a sudden stir in the doorway, a swirl of people laughing and exclaiming. Margarita hurried over.

"That's an aide to the French diplomatic mission, come with some of his friends to see Guadalajara, the Pearl of the West," Edmundo explained. "Louis is a wild one, but a lot of fun," he went on with a somewhat reminiscent air that led Ellen to believe Edmundo had participated in some of that wildness. The young Frenchman with the dashing mustache and the flashing dark eyes had a gay flamboyance about him that attracted people as moths to a flame.

"I'm surprised he hasn't brought a feminine partner," Ellen commented.

Edmundo laughed. "The lady with whom he is keeping company would hardly be welcome here," he said, watching to see her reaction.

"Oh? Is she then of the *demi-monde*?" Ellen asked, interested. "I'm so sorry she isn't here, I've never met anyone like that. When I was twelve, I wanted to be a nurse, and when I was fourteen, I wanted to be a veterinarian, but when I was sixteen, I wanted to be a lady like that. In the naughty novels we used to sneak into the finishing school where I went, those ladies always seemed to have a much better time than the dull nice girls ever did."

Edmundo laughed again. "My dear, you're a real gem. I wonder if Carlos has any idea what a marvellous woman he has. I'm awfully fond of him, but he can be a real stick at times. I'm surprised he had sense enough to grab on to you. As a matter of fact, Louis's current light of love is an old flame of Carlos's. I wouldn't bring it up except that Margarita is sure to sooner or later. She is suffering rather thoroughly from the green-eyed monster—Carlos was always her favorite."

"Carlos having flames hardly makes him out to be a stick, does it?"

"*Touché*. But you must realize that men like Carlos will never marry women like that. Every woman here gets put in her little cubbyhole, and from there she never moves. I think you are unclassifiable, and therefore I'm afraid you might make Carlos unhappy at times."

"I do, Edmundo, I certainly do." She had known Edmundo for only an hour, but felt as if she had known him all her life. In the process of looking vainly around for Carlos, her glance crossed that of the wild Louis across the room. She saw him gesture toward her with his head as he asked a question of a man standing next to him. The man also looked at her and said something to the young Frenchman. He nodded and said something back, smiling, then turned away. So much for any conquest she may briefly have thought she made there. She was a little sorry, for he looked as if he would be fun to talk to.

Edmundo, meanwhile, had turned serious. "Be gentle with Carlos, Elena, he still has much to learn. Here in Mexico we men strut about and preen ourselves like fighting cocks, but inside we're terrified that something is going to belittle our manhood. We find it very hard to laugh at ourselves."

She thought to herself that very possibly this plump engaging little man with the ready smile and witty conversation was the best man in the room. He at least was not afraid to laugh at himself. She pressed his hand impul-

sively. "I like you, Edmundo. I like you very much. And yes, I'll try to be gentle with Carlos, but he certainly doesn't make it easy."

Edmundo neatly snatched two glasses of champagne off a passing tray and handed her one. "Elena, here we've all been raised to believe that wives are nothing and mothers are everything. That's true of everyone from the lowest *peon* to Porfirio himself. A woman is meant to have children, and that is all she's good for—unless she's a prostitute or a bad woman, in which case you don't marry her."

"But you and Carlos were educated in England. They don't believe that there."

He gave a humorless laugh. "Our attitudes were formed centuries before we were ever born. The Church has had a great deal to do with it, and Spanish culture, and the side of the Aztecs that encouraged them to cut the hearts from living victims. The ruling class, if you can call us that, are clever and cruel and lazy and sensual, but scratch any one of us and you'll find a terrified superstitious peasant. Those of us who are not true *gachupines*, pure Spaniards, play at being European and are secretly ashamed of our own heritage. There isn't a Mexican in this room who doesn't covet you for your blonde hair and fair skin. One day the whole tottering structure will collapse about our ears. If you don't believe we know it, ask yourself why we are trying to keep a vain, eighty-year-old tyrant who's lost his grip in office—we're afraid if he goes, we go, too. And so we shall, Elena, so we shall. You've come just in time to witness the end of an era."

Before she could answer, there was a general announcement that dinner was served, and everyone began moving into the huge dining room. As she sat down, she found that Edmundo was on one side of her and an empty chair with no place card on the other.

"That's strange," Edmundo muttered in Spanish.

"Margarita couldn't have been that silly."

Ellen looked across the table to find Carlos sitting diagonally opposite her between an elderly woman with a strange arrangement of grey corkscrew curls and a striking woman of about thirty with black hair, a fair complexion, and eyes so dark they looked black.

"See that woman to the right of Carlos?" Edmundo asked. "She's the wife of an elderly senator and another old flame of Carlos's. Margarita overplayed her hand that time, I think."

"Carlos certainly did get around, didn't he?" Ellen murmured, more curious than anything else about his past life. She was hardly so naive as to suppose that he had reached the tender age of thirty-three without ever having had a fling.

There were still some of the forty guests milling about looking for their place cards. Margarita was sitting at the foot of the table, and at the head a man Ellen hadn't met who looked like a thinner, taller, longer-nosed version of Carlos.

"That's Salvador," Edmundo indicated their host. "He's the third brother sitting in for Martín, Margarita's banker husband who is off in Paris at the moment. I wanted to introduce you to him, but he came late and there wasn't time. He makes Carlos look like a crashing liberal. His wife Catalina is that mousy little thing three seats down from Carlos. She's a perfect Mexican wife: docile, meek, and mild, without a single opinion she hasn't cleared with Salvador. He's the oldest by seven years, I'm next, then Margarita, and Carlos is the baby."

"Carlos is younger than you?" Ellen asked incredulously.

"Yes he is, by four years. I can't help it, I'm just a walking fountain of youth." He grinned engagingly. "Maybe it's being fat that does it. I haven't the guts to go looking for someone like you for fear of being turned

down, and I won't marry another Catalina who would bore me to death, so I remain a youthful and carefree bachelor."

She was vaguely aware of someone sitting down beside her, and at the same moment became also aware that Margarita was glowering at her. She looked at Edmundo, whose attention was still on Salvador and then heard a smooth voice say in French, "Edmundo, introduce me to the lady, *s'il vous plaît*."

As Edmundo began the introductions, she found herself looking into the amused dark eyes of Louis, who turned out to be the Comte of Soisson et Argent. "Ah, lucky Carlos!" he exclaimed in French. Noticing her answering smile, he went on hopefully, "*Parlez-vous français?*"

"*Mais oui, monsieur le comte*, we are not all barbarians in *les Etats-Unis*."

Edmundo, who had been ignoring his dinner partner to observe their meeting, gave a snort of laughter. "Margarita is going to be doubly put out. She meant the count to sit by her, and I think he switched name cards so that she's got that bore Genovais next to her instead. And now she'll see soon enough that you speak French to boot. Oh, I can't wait." He went on chuckling.

Ellen pretended to pay no attention, though a smile tugged at her lips, and she continued to talk to Louis, who lost no time begging her to call him by his given name. He was telling her a very funny story about an inventor he had met in New Jersey who had invited him to go along on the maiden flight of his extraordinary-looking flying machine. Louis spoke little English and the inventor next to no French, but they both ended up sitting in the strange three-winged contraption with their feet in stirrups actually taken from a saddle. There was a propellor and motor on each wing on each side, making six in all, and as they sat there calmly the six propellers gradually shook the

plane to pieces without moving it until they were left sitting, still with their feet in the stirrups, but supported only by a piece of frame resting on the wheels.

Ellen laughed delightedly. "I can feel for your inventor friend. When I was seven, Billy Morton and I tried to make a flying horse out of my mare Clementine by fastening big paper wings to her that we intended to pump up and down, one to each wing. With the first pump of the wings, poor old Clementine took off running and soon snapped off our promising experiment when she squeezed between two oak trees, the third oak tree ridding her of us as well."

The dinner was both cooked and served in the French fashion, and as the vegetable course of spinach soufflé with mushrooms was being served, Ellen glanced over at Carlos, to find him glowering at her just as Margarita had. She smiled at him reassuringly, but he merely looked away, pretending not to be interested. "I'm afraid," she said ruefully to Edmundo, "that by the time the evening is over, you'll be the only one of the Alvarez family speaking to me. Even Salvador looks at me as if he'd just found a cockroach in his last mouthful of soufflé, and he hasn't even met me."

"They'll have to get used to you, my dear, give them time. You are like sunlight and fresh air suddenly striking into an old attic. The creatures living there scurry for cover. If Carlos is going to marry a beauty, he'd best get used to your receiving admiring attention from other men. What's galling him especially at the moment is that he knows perfectly well that his ex-mistress is now the present mistress of Louis here. I don't know if he expected her to become a nun when he dropped her to go to the United States, but I suppose he thought she might have waited a bit longer before taking up with someone else."

"So I got Carlos between affairs, so to speak?"

"You and I are realists, Elena, and one day you might

need this knowledge. You are moving in a decadent, sick society that will require all of your realism and clear-sightedness if you're to survive it intact. When either sex becomes too dominant, the society will have excesses. In Rome the women became too dominant, and you got the Messalinas and Agrippinas whose dissipations outdid even experts like Nero and Caligula."

"You really think that Mexico is heading for a smash?"

"The only thing that would have saved it was if a moderate like Madero had gotten in, but Díaz had him thrown in jail, and now we're stuck with the old man, like it or not, until he pulls the whole roof down on our heads."

"But what about all of these celebrations, his birthday, the centennial, and all? Even in the United States everyone is excited about them."

"In a few years, no one will remember them. The best we can hope for is for old Porfirio to drop dead soon, which he may well do, and a moderate strong enough to take over without any argument to call for elections."

"*Cherie*, enough of this serious talk," Louis broke in, his French liquid, beautifully enunciated. "I have done my duty to my other dinner partner, and now I want to talk to you again. Get lost, Edmundo," he laughed, "she's mine for dessert."

Edmundo chuckled good naturedly and obediently began to talk to the middle aged lady on his left. Louis gazed soulfully into her eyes. "You know what's happened, don't you?" he asked. When she shook her head, he answered his own question. "I have fallen madly in love with you. You are so different, so refreshing. When can you meet me tomorrow?"

She laughed lightly. "Louis, if I didn't know your reputation, I would be terrified that you meant it. Since I have no intention of having to see you and Carlos fight a duel, I must refuse your kind invitation. You must think me a loose woman."

"Ah, never loose, *cherie*, only so charming that I could not resist my improper proposal. I am mad with desire that will not be quenched until I can hold you in my arms."

"Then you'll likely expire from it," she pointed out unsympathetically, "because I won't be meeting you anywhere unless we happen to come to the same party once again." She changed the subject. "Oh look! What a gorgeous dessert!" A huge mousse was brought in, stuck with small paper flags of France, Mexico, Germany, and the United States. "Why Germany?" she asked Louis.

He frowned. "There are a great number of Germans in Mexico, in fact a large colony right here in Guadalajara. See that old gentleman across the table with the big grey mustache? Well, he and his wife are both German, and that couple down toward Salvador, she's wearing the chartreuse dress. The Franco-Prussian War settled nothing—sooner or later we're going have to do it all over again."

"Now who's being too serious?" Edmundo asked in French. "If all you're going to talk about is war, then it's my turn to whisper sweet nothings in Elena's ear."

All through the concert singer's recitation after dinner, Elena kept herself from boredom by drinking in the colorful, exotic scene. The black coats and white shirt fronts of the men set off the silks and satins of every brilliant hue that abounded in the dresses of the women. Not even in grand hotels around Pasadena and Los Angeles had she seen gatherings more elegant. Some of the older ladies wore frumpish clothes, but the younger ones were all dressed in the height of French fashion, and Ellen once more blessed Carlos's generosity and foresight in buying her a new wardrobe.

When the concert was over, everyone talked a bit before the first couples began to depart. Ellen found herself between a frowning Margarita and a scowling Carlos saying goodnight to everyone as they left. Louis

kissed her gloved hand and then squeezed it in his as he looked deeply into her eyes. "Carlos, you are to be congratulated," he said, "Why oh why didn't I see her first?"

"It seems to me you've got enough to keep you busy already," Carlos replied acidly. "Goodnight, Louis."

Louis grinned impudently, bowed over Margarita's hand while murmuring praises of the evening, and swept out with his top hat and cane at jaunty angles. Salvador and Edmundo were staying over until their departure for Zacatecas the next day.

"How about a nightcap?" Edmundo suggested to Carlos. "My goodness, your wife made an impression, and speaking French, too!"

"Yes, I'll have a nightcap," Carlos agreed, ignoring Edmundo's comment about Ellen. "I have a great deal to ask about what's been going on while I was gone."

Ellen was disappointed but philosophical that Carlos was going to immerse himself in business their first night in real civilization since Los Angeles. She knew he was furious with her, though she wasn't sure why except that it seemed to involve jealousy of Louis. As if he thought she could possibly take Louis seriously. He was as handsome and agreeable and pleasant as that mousse they had for dessert, and with just about as much substance. She sighed. It had been fun to flirt with someone for once who was openly admiring instead of always disapproving of whatever she did. Actually, Carlos would do better to be jealous of Edmundo, who was quite a man under that plump and humorous exterior. It was worth Carlos's anger just to have met him, and she hoped he would be her friend.

Poor Lupita was curled up on the rug of her bedroom fast asleep, but woke with a start when she heard the door close. Sleepily she helped Ellen out of her gown and stays, and brushed out her hair even though Ellen tried to get her to go to bed.

"Hasta mañana, Lupita—que le duerma bien," she said as Lupita slipped out the door with a bright smile though she knew the child would sleep well with or without her good wishes.

She finally climbed into the big bed tired herself, and she was soon fast asleep. She had no idea how much later it was when she felt her shoulder shaken none too gently and looked up to see Carlos, still fully dressed, standing beside the bed.

"You certainly had a triumph for yourself," Carlos said in a furious tone. "I have my whole family asking me if you are always so immodest, if that's the way people comport themselves in the United States."

"Your brother Edmundo, too?" she asked sweetly.

"Of course not Edmundo, you were playing up to him as well."

"Is that so? Except for Edmundo, I wouldn't give five cents for the rest of you put together, Margarita is jealous because I married you, your prig of a brother Salvador disapproves because I'm not a meek little mouse like Catalina, who's afraid to open her mouth without his approval, and you've made up your mind ever since you married me that you're going to do your best to make me sorry for it!"

"Well, if you're not sorry for it, I am."

On the verge of snapping back, she remembered Edmundo's plea to be gentle. "Carlos, Carlos, what gets into us? I don't want to fight with you. I was so pleased before the party that you seemed proud of me, and I thought you'd be pleased I spoke French, too. Louis doesn't mean a thing to me. He was a delightful dinner companion, and any woman who says she doesn't like being flattered by a handsome man is lying. But I'd far rather have sat beside you, and you could have told me about everyone there. As it was, there were a lot of people I hardly met and certainly knew nothing about." She sat

up in bed so that he didn't seem to tower over her so.

He stood looking down at her as she sat up in one of the ruffled beribboned nightgowns he had bought for her, and on his face was a look almost of anguish. He gave a groan then, and buried his face between her breasts. "I love you so much, Rapunzel, that to see you laughing and flirting with other men is like a knife in my very heart. I—I'm sorry."

She knew what the apology had cost him, and without answering she stroked his head and held him against her. That night they didn't sleep in separate bedrooms after all.

5

"No, señora, *one doesn't say* no le hace, *one says no importa*. *No le hace* is an expression of the lower classes."

Though still in his twenties, Sr. Velasquez smelled musty, as if he had been kept in a damp closet for too long. His protuberant eyes and almost skeletal thinness made him a figure of fun to the village children he was supposed to teach, and Ellen herself had a hard time taking him seriously. She had allowed Carlos to go ahead and arrange Spanish lessons for her, for she realized from her stay at Margarita's that the Spanish she had learned from Rosa and the others at Las Cruces was the Spanish of the poor people: rich in idiom and Indian words, but hopelessly ungrammatical and full of what Margarita would call vulgar usages.

Now nine months later Sr. Velasquez, from a once-great Guadalajara family that had fallen on hard times, was still rooting these vulgarisms from her speech. He had tried to get her to adopt the faint lisp that was an imitation

of the Spaniards' speech, but she drew the line at that.

"I refuse to sound like one of those simpering females I've had to suffer during those interminable parties. What's the matter with you Mexican men, that you speak only to each other and never to women unless you want to take them to bed?"

Sr. Velasquez blushed. He hated it when she talked like that, but she couldn't resist teasing him. Besides, there were things that she genuinely wanted to know. "We are a proud and proper people, Doña Elena, and it is considered impolite to discuss certain subjects with ladies. Politics, for instance, and business."

"And since politics, business, horses, and dirty jokes are about all that you men ever discuss, that really does limit things, doesn't it?" She sighed, thinking of those endless social gatherings in which the men always collected at one end of the room and the women at the other. She had even been to one neighboring *hacienda* where there were chairs placed side by side along two long walls of the great *sala*, like a setup for an elaborate children's game. The men sat on one side and the women on the other, staring at each other uneasily across a seemingly limitless vacant space. The woman on her left was talking to the woman on the side opposite Ellen, as was the woman to her right, both of them no doubt thinking she knew no Spanish and what did one talk to a *gringa* about anyway? They left her in a strange limbo, as if she were invisible. When she had tried to arrange *comidas* at Santa Cruz in which men and women were deliberately mixed, Carlos put a stop to it.

"But they don't separate men and women at social functions in Europe," Ellen protested. "Even your sister in Guadalajara doesn't."

"She does when she is entertaining the country gentry. I'm sorry, *querida*, but that is the way of our country except in the highest social circles, and that is the way you

must learn to do things. You're lucky, it wasn't so long ago that the women weren't even allowed to eat at the same time as the men; they had to wait their turn and take what was left."

"You'll never know how sick I am of hearing endlessly of the women's aches and pains and headaches and cramps. They hardly even talk about their children, whom they don't raise anyway, and only occasionally complain about their maids and gossip about each other. Yet their illnesses they go on and on about until I feel like screaming. At least you get to listen to off-color jokes."

His face stiffened. "What do you mean, off-color jokes? How would you know?"

"Come on, Carlos, what do you suppose elicits those loud appreciative guffaws, certainly not politics or cattle. That kind of laughter means only one thing in any country."

Their argument ended in a draw, but she realized that even at Las Cruces the men and the women stayed apart. She began to know how much she had taken for granted in her relationships with men in California; her father, Billy Morton, Manuel, Joe, the neighboring ranchers. She felt as free to talk to them as to their wives, and it never occurred to the women that they weren't to discuss cattle and drought and feed and even politics as freely as the men.

When Sr. Velasquez left, she wondered if she would have time for a ride before *comida* at 2:30, and decided she would. Tomás, their American administrator, was coming for lunch, which meant a lot of discussion of *hacienda* affairs that she was not welcome to join. Carlos was busy these days supervising Edmundo's sugar operation, whose administrator was not as capable of being left to his own devices as was Tomás. She missed Edmundo dreadfully, and wished he would come back. She and Edmundo had seen a great deal of each other, she riding

over to the sugar mill or Edmundo visiting Santa Cruz, and for a miracle Carlos had never objected. He knew that Edmundo seemed to have a calming effect on her rebelliousness, and he welcomed their friendship.

One day early in March, "I've come to say goodbye," Edmundo announced to Carlos and Ellen.

"Goodbye!" Carlos exclaimed, startled. "Where in the devil are you going?"

"I'm going to fight for Madero in the north."

Carlos began to get angry. "And just who do you think will run the sugar mill while you're traipsing around up there getting your backside shot off by the *federales*?"

"You will," Edmundo said calmly, lighting a cigar. "You've done it before, and very capably too, when I went to Europe. The administrator does most of it anyway."

"But Edmundo, you could be killed," Ellen protested. "This isn't any of your affair."

"Elena, it's everyone's affair. Madero can save the country, but he'll need support to throw out Diaz. If men like me won't join him, who will? If Madero doesn't get in, we'll have a radical rabble-rouser who will strip us all of our lands and put our heads in a noose to boot. I'll be fighting to save you and Carlos and Salvador and our whole society, though at times I wonder if it's worth saving." There was no good humor in his face now.

Carlos gave an exclamation of disgust. "Madero doesn't stand a chance. The government forces will run him down in no time, and he and you with him will be strung up to the nearest lamppost."

"We'll see," Edmundo replied evenly, and mounted his horse once again.

Carlos went into the house shaking his head, but Ellen stayed and put a hand on his knee. "Please don't go, Edmundo. You're all that's made life here bearable for me."

He looked down on her lifted face and smiled sadly. "That is another reason I must go." They looked at each other in silence for a long moment, then he leaned down and kissed her gently. "Goodbye, Elena. I'll think of you."

"Goodbye, Edmundo. *Vaya con Diós.*" She had stood there long after he was out of sight, the tears falling unheeded down her face.

It was June now, and down at the stable she saw Tomás working with sixteen strands of rawhide, weaving them over and under each other with a sure hand, while slowly there emerged a single round length that would be one of a pair of reins. He was an enigma to her, unfailingly polite and cool, giving nothing of himself. His blue eyes, startling with his tan face and black hair, also gave away nothing.

He and Carlos had a relationship of unexpected closeness. They were both men who did not make friends easily, but the only time Ellen had ever seen Tomás show any strong emotion was when a wild cow they had roped to brand right out in the hills had turned on Carlos, who was still off his horse putting out the branding fire. Ellen and Tomás had eased up on the ropes, letting the cow struggle to her feet. Usually newly branded animals were all too willing to put as much distance as possible between them and their tormentors, but this one with a bellow of rage headed right for the kneeling man, whom she knocked sprawling with her first charge. Tomás put his horse at her and whipped her in the face with his rope, which convinced her to turn away, and he and Ellen herded her over the hill.

"Stay here," he said grimly, and galloped back.

Of course she didn't, and she came over the hill just in time to see him leap off his horse and take the unconscious Carlos gently in his arms, feeling with one hand for broken bones. She could not forget the tender way he wiped

the dirt and blood from Carlos's face. As she came up to them, she saw that Tomás's face was open for once, seeming suddenly very young.

"He's all right," he told her with relief, and Carlos stirred then and opened his eyes.

"*Mil gracias*, little brother," Carlos said with a smile that changed to a wince as he sat up.

Edmundo had explained to her, "Tomás was an only child and a *gringo* at that, which made a loner of him. Of all the boys Tomás knew, Carlos was the only one who tried to be his friend. After Carlos came back from school in England, they drank together, whored together, and in general raised hell right across Guadalajara. While Carlos was away at school, however, Tomás made it his business to learn about *haciendas* and cattle. When he'd learned the practice of cattle, he went to California to learn the science. Carlos pretends to give him orders now and then just to keep his hand in, but he's perfectly well aware that Tomás knows more about cattle and horses than he'll ever have the patience to learn."

"Then why was it Carlos who went to the United States to get the horses and seed bulls?"

"When word came that Texas had a flareup of encephalitis, it was Tomás who knew about your father's ranch from friends who had been at the University of California with him. Didn't he ever tell you? It made sense for Carlos to go, however, because it is he who knows about investing money, and the smart ones are taking their cash assets out of Mexico now. Without Carlos's financial sense, they could hardly feel free to do crazy things like shipping animals all the way from California.

"It was Tomás's idea to plant the fruit orchards and vegetable fields to feed the *hacienda* with plenty left over to sell in Guadalajara. Our avocados are known throughout Jalisco, and building the distillery has meant that we

can not only make cane alcohol, but market our own tequila and mescal besides. The tequila business has made pulque, the primitive fermentation of the maguey plant, all but obsolete in Jalisco already. If you're too poor to drink mescal, cane alcohol is cheaper, cleaner, and safer. Add our sugar production to all that, and small though it is, we have one of the few *haciendas* in Mexico that is more than self-sustaining. Without Tomás," he ended, "we would be just another sore on the landscape like all the others, using the land without making it produce."

"*Qué, Tomás,*" she said now, "you aren't usually to be found close to home this time of day."

He looked at her and shrugged. "I have to be here in time for your *comida* anyway, and I've already put in a seven-hour day."

"Do you hear anything about the fighting in the north? I don't like to ask Carlos because he gets so angry and won't tell me anyway."

"It's over."

"Over?"

"Not only over, but Diaz is out and Madero is in. Madero was due to arrive in Mexico City three days ago."

"How did you find out?"

"When the produce wagons we sent to Guadalajara came back with supplies the other day, the drivers told me."

"Does Carlos know?"

"I told him."

"Why wouldn't he have said anything? Do you suppose he's still that angry about Edmundo?"

"Could be. I guess Edmundo will be coming back now. Carlos should be happy about that, though Edmundo may have to go again sooner than he thinks."

"Go again? Whatever for?"

"You don't really think that milksop Madero will be

able to hold that wild bunch together, do you? I'll be surprised if he lasts a year the way he mucked everything up in the north."

Blue eyes and all, Tomás had always seemed far more Mexican to her than *gringo*, and yet here he was actually sharing political opinions with her, something Carlos steadfastly refused to do. "Madero couldn't have mucked it up too badly or he wouldn't be coming to Mexico City, would he?" she pointed out triumphantly.

"The only reason he's coming to Mexico City except in chains is an illiterate savage named Pancho Villa. Without Villa, he'd still be holed up somewhere in Texas having to do his own laundry."

"Surely Edmundo wouldn't go off again if Madero really is a milksop."

"We may all have to go off, not just Edmundo. Now that Porfirio is no longer in charge, do you have any idea what can happen when the *peons* discover that the *rurales* police are back to being bandits again? You'll have so many outlaws wandering around, there won't be room for a jack rabbit. The first target of those bandits is going to be the isolated *haciendas* where they can burn and loot and murder to their heart's content. I wouldn't give you a plugged nickel for how loyal our workers are going to turn out to be, either. Look at what's happened with Zapata in Morelia already."

"Maybe if our workers had been treated better..." Ellen said slowly.

"Ours are lucky. They don't get paid much, but at least it's in money, and our company store doesn't cheat them, either. We even have a school now for their children. Neither Carlos nor I have any interest in bedding down the local girls, and the only time anyone is beaten is when I can't get his attention any other way."

"You shouldn't beat them at all."

"No?" He looked at her appraisingly. "Come here, I

want to show you something."

He stopped his braiding and led the way to the other side of the stables where the tie-stalls were. A grey burro stood with drooping head and paid no attention to them as they entered. In the dim light Ellen at first couldn't see what was wrong with the animal, but then her eyes adjusted and she gasped. His ears were bloody stumps, and there was only a raw end where his tail had been. There was also a deep raw place on his withers, crusted with dried blood and black with flies.

"Dear God," she murmured, "what happened to him?"

"Odón overloaded him yesterday without proper padding under the saddle, and wore that hole in his back. I really tore a strip off Odón, and threatened to dock his pay if he ever did anything that careless again. He apparently got drunk on cane alcohol last night and decided it was the burro's fault he'd been bawled out, and he cut off his ears and tail. I've seen them do as much to animals that only got into a corn field because the fence was down, or they'd broken a rotten tie rope." He patted the burro on the neck. "So I beat him. That's the only way that he and the others who saw the beating won't do it again."

"How could they bring themselves, drunk or sober, to mutilate a helpless animal like that?"

"Some of it's the Church, that goes out of its way to teach them that animals have no souls, which gets carried the one step farther that they don't have any feelings, either. These people have all been so brutalized by their own families when they were growing up that they know nothing but being brutal themselves. I beat them for maiming animals and I beat them for beating up their wives and children. Give me a whole generation here, and I might even manage to break the vicious circle, but we won't have a generation, that I know. We'll be fortunate if it's only a few years."

"You really believe that, don't you?"

"Well, it doesn't take much imagination to picture what men like Odón are going to feel like doing if it looks as if we're in trouble. I know why I'm beating them, because there's nothing but force that will make them listen, and a few of their wives and children might know, but they themselves? Never." He looked at his large, clever hands and flexed his fingers. "They only know in the end that if they do certain things they'll be beaten, so it's better to humor me and not do them."

"I find it hard to believe that people like Jorge and Lupita and Ofelia and Guillermo would ever offer to do us harm."

"I've heard stories from the north—" He stopped, rubbing the burro's rump thoughtfully with one hand. "I don't know which way the house servants will jump, they might stick with us, but the field hands and *vaqueros* will turn on us. The only thing that will save us are possibly the women—you for sure and Carlos and me maybe."

"Why me?"

He looked at her with a little smile. "I make it my business to know what goes on. I know, for instance, that you spoke idiomatic Spanish when you came here, and I know that you and Lupita have been going almost every day to the village to doctor them. I know you've been delivering babies that the midwives won't, dressing cuts and burns, and telling the women why and how to be clean, what to feed babies when the milk fails, and what to do for fever. You've been lucky or smart or both, and no one you've helped has died."

"You didn't tell Carlos I spoke Spanish? He was so angry about my speaking French I decided not to."

"No, that's a harmless enough secret." He grinned. "I imagine you got an earful from his family, though, when they didn't think you understood them."

She grinned back. "Only Margarita, really. I haven't seen that much of Salvador, thank heavens, and Edmundo for some reason always liked me."

"Edmundo is a fooler," Tomás commented. "Too many people think he's an affable clown, but he's probably the best of the lot."

"I would have thought you'd say Carlos was the best of the lot."

"He's the one I like the best, the one I'm closest to, but he hasn't Edmundo's flexibility, nor his feeling for other people, either. Look what Carlos is doing to you."

She felt they were suddenly on dangerous ground, that once said there were things that could never be taken back, never be unsaid. And yet, "I'm not aware that anything is being done to me," she replied, nonetheless hoping he would say more. It was the first time since she had come that he had ever talked to her at all, yet here they were exchanging views over the back of a mutilated burro.

"Yes, you are. Don't leave him, Ellen—he needs you more than he knows. He's trying to break out of the *macho* prison that Mexico imposes on her men, but it's hard, harder than you can ever really understand."

"You're the second one who's asked me to treat Carlos gently."

"Edmundo?"

She nodded.

He gave that little smile again, his eyes for the first time friendly as well. "Then I'm in good company, aren't I? You won't have time now to ride before *comida*, I'm sorry I kept you so long."

"I'm not, Tom There's so much I don't know and so many mistakes I make that I need every friend I can find."

"No one has called me Tom for years—they called me Mex in California. Only my father ever called me Tom."

"Then I'm the one in good company." She knew from his tone of voice that he had loved his father. "I'll see you up at the house a little later." She left him absently rubbing the burro's nose.

She was out in the kitchen making the salad dressing

when she heard the sound of galloping hoofs. Ofelia turned from the window to see Edmundo jumping off a strange horse and throwing the reins to Jorge. As he started for the house, she dashed out the back door and ran to him, throwing her arms around his neck and hugging him hard.

"Edmundo, thank God you've come back safely! But what have they done to you?" Where he used to be comfortable to hug, like a big teddy bear, he was bony, and now that his big sombrero was off, she saw that he was hardly like Edmundo at all, rather a smaller, thinner version of Carlos.

He gave her a tired smile. "I've been to the moon and back, Elena. It's cold and dark and hostile and lonely up there; don't ever let them tell you it's made of green cheese. Riding here felt like travelling the great frozen wastes at the top of the world."

Arm in arm they walked to the front door where Carlos was standing, unsure how to greet his errant brother. In the end, pride gave way before love, and with tears in his eyes he embraced Edmundo warmly.

"When we didn't hear from you, there were times we thought sure you must have been killed," Carlos said.

"There were times I wished I had," Edmundo answered, no trace left of the wry humor that had always been his.

The *comida* was a strange affair, everyone verbally tiptoeing around Edmundo, unsure how to relate to this thin, grim-faced stranger. Edmundo only played with his food, but drank glass after glass of wine, which seemed to have no effect on him except to blur his speech faintly. Ellen noticed that as the meal dragged on, Edmundo's face became flushed and his eyes glittered strangely. It was Tom who finally put in words what they were all on the edge of thinking.

"Edmundo, are you sick? How do you feel?" Tom

reached over clasped Edmundo's hand, then turned to the others. "He's burning up, he ought to be in bed."

Ellen took charge then, berating herself mentally for not having recognized Edmundo's state long before. It wasn't half an hour before she was sitting on his bed spooning chicken broth into him, which he promptly vomited back up.

"You damned fool, why didn't you say you were sick? I should have known when I first saw you, but I was so glad you were back . . ."

"Strange," Edmundo said weakly in Spanish, "but all the while I was in the north, I saw men dropping in their tracks with dysentery, typhoid, typhus, you name it, and I never had a sick day except in my soul." He closed his eyes but held on to her hand. "If it hadn't been for thinking of you, I'd have gone mad."

When she saw that he slept, she went to get a basin of water, a cloth, and a pottery *olla* of water to hang in his room to cool.

"He has one of the bad fevers," she told Carlos and Tom. "Maybe typhoid, it's too early to tell. He'll have to be nursed day and night if I'm right, and we could lose him anyway. You men and your damned politics!" she ended viciously and left the room calling for Lupita. Tom and Carlos looked at each other in silence.

Though Edmundo slept restlessly, he woke in the morning clear-headed and with less fever. Ellen began to have hopes that the worst might be over and that this was only one of the brief unexplained illnesses that were rife in Mexico. She asked Carlos to look in on him from time to time and assigned Lupita to stay in the room. The girl was frightened, but Ellen thought she could trust her, young as she was. She had asked for her from Margarita as a wedding present, and Carlos's sister, obviously seeing little of value in the shy fifteen-year-old, had acquiesced. Ellen had some breakfast and went to bed herself. •

"Elena! Elena!" It was Carlos shaking her, a worried look on his face. "For God's sake, wake up! Edmundo's worse."

He was indeed worse. The fever had climbed again, this time high enough to put him out of his head, though it was only a little past noon. What would it be by night?

"Has he had any diarrhea?" Ellen asked Lupita.

The girl shook her head. "He vomited the soup you said to give him, but then told me not to wake you, that he felt much better."

Ellen looked at Edmundo, who was highly flushed, his eyes bloodshot and half open. He was muttering something, but not clearly enough to be understood. "Lupita, bring the jar of cane alcohol from the kitchen storeroom. If I find that Jorge has been drinking it again, I'll skin him alive!" She turned to Carlos. "Go count cattle or train a horse or something. You won't approve of what I'm going to do, and I have enough to deal with as it is."

When Carlos showed remarkable good sense by leaving without an argument, Ellen stripped off the covers and gently removed the pajamas she had put on Edmundo the night before. When Lupita arrived with the alcohol, Ellen began to wipe down the naked man with it.

"Ah Mama, that feels so good," Edmundo. "I was burning."

She pulled up the sheet only, and sat watching him until she saw him begin to be restless again.

This time he was in a different place. "Marcos, for God's sake light the fire, it's freezing here. The killing and the cold, the killing cold. We took Agua Prieta, didn't we? What a name for a town, Black Water. We died on both sides while the watching *gringos* cheered. They sat up on their rooftops across the border and sipped their tea and cheered. Hurry, Marcos, it's so cold." He groaned and began to shake with chills.

That day and the next and the next the fever continued,

each day rising higher. Edmundo raved out of his head, most of it making no sense. The house servants, except for Lupita, were terrified to go near him, afraid they would catch whatever he had. They crossed themselves whenever they had to come near his room and whispered to each other that the *señora* would kill him with those cold alcohol baths and cold water drinks. Everyone knew that when you were ill you should be bundled up and given only hot things to eat or drink. Carlos, Lupita, Ellen, and even Tom all spelled each other at Edmundo's bedside. At ten-minute intervals they spooned water into him, as much as they could force down him. Every hour he was rubbed down with water and alcohol. Ellen was past wondering why Carlos had said nothing about her touching a naked man, past even wondering how he was taking the occasional times that Edmundo's raving included her. There was only the gaunt unfamiliar face that finally made her forget entirely what he had looked like before. The party at Margarita's might have been a thousand light years ago instead of just last September.

Through his delirium one scene especially seemed to haunt him over and over again. He would lie there burning, his fingers picking at the sheets. "For the love of God," he would shout, "stop it! You can't do that! Where's Villa? They're tearing the *chinos* to pieces. What did they ever do to you? Drunken animals. . . . Take that, by God—I'll stop you if I have to do it myself. Look out! They've got me. Ah *Diablito mío*, what have they done with you?" The tears he could not shed before would stream down his face. "Women and little children, they're sparing no one. Look, there's one they've fastened to two horses, they're pulling him apart. They've buried those women up to their necks and they're running their horses over their heads. We're cursed, the whole cause is cursed. The devil and his friends have been turned loose on the land—there will be no end to the killing now."

"What does he mean by *chinos*?" she asked Carlos. "I never heard it used except for Chinese or someone with curly hair, and neither makes sense. Is there some meaning I don't know?"

Carlos shrugged. "I don't know what he means. There are Chinese in Mexico, but they have nothing to do with the revolution. I doubt that a lot of them even speak much Spanish. I almost wonder after listening to him if his experiences haven't made him ill in the head. Strange," he mused, "but if Salvador or I had gone, we wouldn't have been nearly as affected. We're pragmatists, Edmundo is a dreamer."

"I've heard Madero is a dreamer, too, though."

"That's what I've always had against him, or I'd have been up there beside Edmundo. This country is too big, too raw, too violent to be run by any but strong men greedy enough for power that they'll drag Mexico into the twentieth century, come what may."

On the fifth day the spots appeared on his chest and stomach, small rose-colored marks that darkened almost to purple and finally spread to the rest of his body, even his face. In three days the rash was gone.

"I don't think it's typhoid now," Ellen told Tom and Carlos. "When I was ten, there was an outbreak of typhoid in the settlement at Las Cruces, and Rosa took me along as always to help. My father knew nothing about it or he'd have fired her for sure. Many died and some lived, but all but one stayed rose-colored and kept coming out for a week. That was when I learned to boil the bedding, as we've been doing with Edmundo. I had his clothes burned the day after he came. Someone should ride to Guadalajara and explain his symptoms to a doctor; there may be something we could be doing for him. We've managed to keep liquid down him, but no one can stand temperatures like that forever."

"Carlos, you'd better stay here. You'd feel terrible if

you were gone and he—well, when he needed you,” Tom said. “I’ll go. Even changing horses, I can’t be back before three days at best.”

“Three days!” Ellen exclaimed. It had taken four and a half just one way when they had come from Guadalajara last September. “I’ll have Ofelia pack food for you to take.”

She and Carlos watched Tom gallop off with sinking spirits, and she realized how much his steadiness and calm assurance had meant. Before long, they missed him even more, for Edmundo’s deliriums became often violent, and it took two of them to hold him down. Ellen could hardly remember when she had last slept.

“Watch out for the machine gun on the left!” he would scream. “Now follow me, charge! They’ve hit Marcos, he’s down—no, only his horse. God I wish I still had Diablito. Kill and kill and kill, will it never end?” Then he would quiet, and they would rub him down with alcohol, but soon the muttering would begin again. “Look at them, they hang like fruit from the trees, the lampposts. *Federales, maderistas*, they all look the same, that awful shapeless settling of the body, the head cocked to one side as if listening to some obscene joke. Is that where I will end, hanging like a sack from some tree in a strange country far from home? I never knew men had it in them to be so cruel. They laugh and joke as they string them up. Some cry and beg, some are stoic. I hope I don’t cry . . .”

They could see the flesh melt away, burnt from the bones until the structure of Edmundo’s face became like a skull. Carlos and Ellen would look at each other, their eyes bleak; Lupita prayed, telling her rosary over and over. It seemed impossible that the human body could stand so much, but the fever went on and on, lower in the morning, incandescent at night, day after day. Sometimes he screamed with the blinding pain in his head and Ellen would have to give him laudanum to quiet him. She and

Carlos were so worn that they hardly reacted when they heard a horse's hoofs drumming on the hard ground outside. Tom came in, grim and unshaven.

"I'd have made it sooner, only one of the horses cast a shoe in the *barrancas*. I went to three different doctors, and all three say it's probably typhus. Two of them say there's nothing you can do that you aren't already doing, and the third one said he would sell me a special medicine that only he knows about for two hundred pesos." He smiled mirthlessly. "I punched him in the nose. Sorry I couldn't have brought better news," he went on. "All of them agree you'd better search him for lice because that's how it's carried."

"Thank you, Tomás," Carlos said. "You did the best you could. We'll just have to go on doing what we can and pray. I wonder if we should get the priest."

"Oh no, Carlos, surely not yet. He's still so strong it takes two of us to hold him." Ellen felt that getting the priest would be admitting Edmundo was dying, would be like giving up. Somehow she knew that their hope and spirit and love were all that were keeping him alive. Caught in a nightmare world of savage cruelty and hate, he had lost his own will to live.

Soon, however, it didn't take two of them to hold him anymore. Day by day he grew weaker, and his visions now were almost all of his childhood. "Don't, Carlitos—if you get your sailor suit wet, they'll blame me. . . . Look, Papa, I can make the top go for a long time, longer than Salvador even. . . . Mama, tell me again the story of how you were lost in Mexico City when you were a little girl. Come on, Margarita, come out—I know you're in there. . . . It's getting dark, Mama. May we have some *tostadas*? I want the red balloon. When can I have a pony of my own? Salvador had one when he was younger than I am. . . ." His murmur was almost constant, a kaleidoscope of images from a happier time when he was small and the world was gentle.

On the twelfth day he began to cough, a hard wracking cough that drained what little strength he had left. His murmuring was now so weak as to be unintelligible, a relief to Ellen even though she knew it was a bad sign. On the fourteenth day, however, for the first time his temperature failed to make the deadly climb toward the evening high. He lay on his side, completely inert, his face a yellowish grey that made him look dead already. Blisters had appeared all around his mouth, and his lips were cracked and bleeding despite the oil Ellen applied. He gave a slight moan with each shallow breath.

When Tom came in to relieve her, she shook her head. "I think he's about to die, I can't leave him now. His fever isn't rising, but I'm afraid it's because there isn't enough vitality to sustain it anymore."

The two of them kept vigil, dozing from time to time, until Carlos came, and then it was the three of them. The night passed silently, broken only by the small groans of the dying man. As the first faint light of morning entered the room, they all three stirred from their exhausted sleep and took up the watch again. Lupita brought in rolls and hot coffee with milk.

"He isn't groaning anymore," Ellen said suddenly. "Has he died then?" She went over to the bed and put her ear to Edmundo's mouth. "No, he's still breathing, just." She felt his forehead. "He's cool. For the first time in weeks, he's cool."

"He'll live?" Carlos demanded, suddenly hopeful.

"I don't know," Ellen said honestly. "I've never seen typhus before, so I know nothing of what to expect. I could have sworn three days ago when he began coughing that he was coming down with pneumonia, but that seems to have gone as well. I would say, let him sleep as long as he rests quietly."

For several hours the three of them stayed, vicariously drawing every breath that Edmundo drew. At last they agreed to allow Lupita to watch, with instructions to

wake them if there was any change. Since the blisters had appeared, they hadn't been able to shave him, and his sprouting beard along with the wasting of the disease made him look fifteen years older. By that afternoon, however, his breathing had strengthened and his color improved. They went back to single watches. On the following morning he came to briefly and managed to swallow some broth. He didn't seem to know them, but he kept down the broth and promptly went to sleep again. It was the better part of another week before he really became fully conscious and remembered from one day to the next conversations he had with them.

Ellen had a chair placed outside where it was cool, and every day she would sit with him under the large mango tree for longer and longer periods of time. In front of them the ground dropped steeply for several hundred yards, a slope that from October to February was covered with a riotous growth of eight-foot pointsettia bushes starred with blazing red blooms. The slope then bottomed out gradually into the rich fields across a mile wide valley where there could be seen different-colored green squares that represented new corn, tomatoes, beans, and the dark plowed ground that would be *milo*, millet. A primitive irrigation system took water from the river that meandered through the valley so that it was possible to have year-round crops. They could see the stone aqueduct that provided the water for the house and its surrounding gardens, the same water that further up the river valley powered the great water wheel at the sugar mill and thereby crushed the cane and made the countless little *piloncillos*, the small cones of raw sugar. Beyond the level planted fields the rugged mountains shouldered their way steeply up out of the valley floor, clothed in dark green with occasional huge slabs and cliff faces of grey rock. Now at the beginning of July, during the long afternoons

there were usually tall thunderheads boiling up over the mountains, and in the evenings would come the lightning and booming thunder along with the drumming of rain on the tile roofs.

Behind them stood the house, its two foot thick white-plastered adobe walls built to keep the inhabitants safe from heat and cold and the roving bandits of another time, though there were rumors that to the south the *rurales* had taken up banditry again, encouraged by the passing of Diaz and the depredations of Zapata. Ellen loved the dim, high ceilinged rooms with their great dark beams from which sifted occasionally here and there a fine dust of termite droppings. When a beam finally weakened, it began to bow under the weight of the roof, and then the tiles, which were only laid on rather than cemented, were lifted off and the beam replaced. The rooms were austere, the walls whitewashed and the floors laid with dark red square tiles. The chairs were made of dark wood with leather slung seats, heavy and blocky-looking, but far more comfortable than the carved wood colonial chairs that Ellen had suffered on in many Guadalajara homes last September. The deeply recessed windows had iron bars and heavy wooden shutters that were drawn closed at night against insects, though they weren't very efficient. During the dry heat of the spring, she and Carlos would sit out on the tiled porch during the warm evenings gazing across the valley at the last of the sunlight reddening the same mountains that she and Edmundo now watched from under the mango tree.

"Edmundo, what did you mean by *chinos* when you were delirious?"

His thin face grew still. "I talked about that?"

"Many times. You said they were being killed. Who were they? Did the *federales* really kill women and children?"

"They were Chinese, and no, it wasn't the *federales*." he

said wearily. "I was a liason from Madero's forces assigned to Villa's army. In Torreón there was quite a settlement of Chinese. They were gentle, clean, industrious, and minded their own business. Unhappily, a few of them ran restaurants, and some of Villa's men, already drunk on a local *aguardiente*, ate in one of them and then proceeded to die of food poisoning. Why anyone decided it was the restaurant and not the local brandy, I never knew, but the word went out that the poisoning was deliberate, that the Chinese were in the pay of Diaz and were spies besides. Some even had it that they were trying to take over Mexico themselves. They had different colored skin," he said bitterly, "and different shaped eyes, and they were clean, that was enough. To make it worse, rumor had it that they were rich and had all their money hidden in their houses.

"I never saw how it started, but suddenly the *villistas* fell upon them in a fashion that will haunt me for as long as I live. The men who followed Villa, and Villa himself for that matter, were as capriciously cruel as a cat with a bird. They were ignorant, brutal, violent, and seemed to take pleasure in killing and torturing. They murdered those unarmed men, women, and children in an orgy of brutality that had to be seen to be believed." He closed his eyes. "They first amused themselves by killing them with knives or shooting them, but that palled, and before long they were pulling them apart with their horses or dragging them at a gallop by their pigtails. They cut them to pieces, beheaded them, performed every savagery their ingenuity could devise. There were *villistas* so soaked with Chinese blood that by the next day their clothes were stiff and they began to stink like carrion."

"And you?"

He sighed. "I was riding Diablito and I tried to stop them. No one paid any attention. At last I lashed out at whomever I could see with a heavy rawhide quirt, but

most paid no attention even to that—they were drunk on blood. Finally five or six of them dragged me off the horse and beat me and left me for dead. Why they didn't knife or shoot me, I'll never know. When I came to hours later, the killing was over and there were bodies everywhere: dead Chinese and dead drunk *villistas*. I never saw Diablito again. Villa and Fierro, his butcher lieutenant, promised to see that he was returned to me, but of course they did nothing."

"Was Villa then such a monster?"

"No; or rather, they are all monsters. That's what illiteracy and poverty and war do to men, make monsters of them. I was liason to Orozco as well, who wiped out whole towns of Mormons. Both sides hung anyone they could capture, and in many cases they hung people they only suspected of being on the opposite side."

"Did Madero really condone all this? Was he really only another monster himself?"

"I and any number of others complained to him about the excesses of Villa and Orozco, but he wouldn't listen, didn't want to listen. He won't last," Edmundo said sadly.

"That's what Tomás says, and Carlos too."

"They're right. For weeks Madero wrung his hands over whether to take Ciudad Juarez or not. If Villa hadn't taken things into his own hands and attacked against orders, we would all still be sitting there—or not all because most of them would have gotten disgusted and gone home."

"Oh Edmundo, I wish you'd never gone." This man was a bitter ghost of the gay and gentle Edmundo who had left to wage a war for justice and right.

"I wish I hadn't, either. In this battle there is no right. If we must turn the country over to butchers like Villa and Orozco, we might as well have kept Diaz. Even God has turned against the slaughter. Did you hear about the terrible earthquake in Mexico City the day Madero was

due for his triumphal procession? The central railway station collapsed, there were great chasms in the streets, and hundreds died. I would that I had been among them."

Ellen took his hand and they sat quietly then, staring across the valley toward the rock-slabbed mountains opposite.

6

The pistol's explosion sounded as a distant sharp crack. With a series of howls, yells, and shrill cries, the faraway line of plunging horses leaped forward and came thundering over the half-mile of packed earth that stretched between them and the spectators, who were already cheering their favorites on. Out from among the bunched horses there appeared a flash of white that separated itself and came on as if floating.

"Looks like Elena is going to take them all," drawled Tomás at Carlos's shoulder. "Now if she can just get the stick—"

"Elena! You mean that's *Elena* on Luz?" Carlos was enraged.

"Well, why not?" Tomás asked reasonably. "Those are all *hacendados*, so she's not lowering herself, and since you wouldn't run and my horse isn't fast enough to catch a cold, someone had to hold up the honor of Santa Cruz."

"I'll tell you why not," Carlos snapped furiously. "She's gone out of her way to humiliate me in front of my friends,

that's what she's done. While snickering behind their hands, they'll congratulate me on my unladylike wife!"

While they were talking, the horsemen, who were strung out now, thundered by. The rider of the white horse slipped down the side of the running animal, hooking her foot behind the saddle horn, and snatched from the ground a striped stick. For a moment it seemed she would have trouble coming up again, but she grasped the *latigo* strap behind the stirrup and pulled herself up to where she could reach the pommel. With a shrill series of yips, she waved the stick triumphantly and slowly brought the mare into a wide circle that would take her back past the spectators.

"The little show-off," Tomás said admiringly. "I never knew a woman who could ride like that."

"And with reason," Carlos retorted angrily. "She could have broken her neck." He looked at Tomás with sudden suspicion. "You didn't have anything to do with all this, did you?"

"Well, I gave her a few pointers on how to go down for the stick," Tomás said modestly, an amused glint in his eyes.

"Damn you, Tomás, that wasn't funny! For two years I've been trying to convince her that there are things well bred ladies simply do not do, and every time I think I'm getting somewhere, something like this happens."

Tomás's amusement died. "Listen well to me, *amigo*. She takes care of the village people, no one could have cared better for Edmundo, and she's accepted with grace your Mexican priggishness. If you want to keep her, you'd best do it on a loose rein. Escapades like today are what make her life here tolerable; don't be too quick to stop them."

"I don't intend to allow her to make a fool of me," Carlos said stiffly. "She has given me no children, only trouble."

"She couldn't make more of a fool of you than you already are," snapped Tomás. "Hasn't it ever occurred to you to wonder why we aren't having the same problems with our people that the other *haciendas* are having?"

"Our management is enlightened, that's why," Carlos said defensively, "and I am here, not in Europe or Mexico City all the time."

"Maybe enlightened by other standards, but not by mine. We may pay our men in actual money, but they are still forced to use the *hacienda* store because there is no other. And the money we do pay them is pitifully small. Why do you think they're all in debt? My God, when you have to borrow money to get married, borrow to have your baby baptized, and borrow for the wake to have the child buried because you can't borrow money enough to get him to Guadalajara to the doctor, what are you but a slave? Our people don't run off to join outlaws like Negrito or Zapata because they know Elena cares for them. Go into the village with her one day and see how they greet her, it should open your eyes to a lot of things."

"If she gets along so well with the peons, why can't she get along as well with my friends?" Carlos demanded.

"Because most of your friends are idiots," Tomás answered grimly. "They pose and posture and pretend to be more European than Mexican. The poor women are hardly emancipated, but in many ways they live more real lives than the wives of your friends. In their minds, winning today will make a legend of Elena, their own personal angel beating the spoiled sons of some of the most hated *hacendados* in Jalisco. Just thank God you've got Elena, or your workers too would be melting away to the mountains. Believe me, those who go to the mountains will one day soon return, and then we can all pray—for all the good it will do us."

"I don't agree with you; my people love me," Carlos argued stubbornly.

Tomás shrugged. "Have it your way. But if I were you, at least I would pretend today that I was proud of her. It will help you with the workers and it will help you with your friends, who will take their attitude from yours, and it will help you with *her*, which God knows you need. What have you been doing to her?"

"We have been friends for a long time, Tomás," Carlos answered him levelly, "but there are some things that are none of your business."

"Ah, but it is very much my business. If her pride moves her finally to leave you because of some foolishness about sons and heirs, then I'll be packing my bags as well because this whole ridiculous tottering structure of *haciendas*, absentee owners, and exploitation of human beings is going to come crashing down about our ears. Edmundo knows it and so do I. With Elena here, we might—just *might*, mind you—be able to ride it out."

"I'm sick and tired of Edmundo and his dire warnings," Carlos scoffed. "Ever since he came back from that hare-brained venture in the north, he's been wailing about the awful things that are about to happen, but they don't happen, do they?"

"No one listened to Cassandra, either," Tomás said and turned away to go to the stables.

That night, Ellen looked down the enormous candlelit table in the formal dining room, a long high-ceilinged room with wrought iron chandeliers full of candles lighting a scene of gaiety and brilliant dresses and frequent toasts. The fifty people gathered there represented the landed gentry for a hundred miles around. There were the monumental mustaches—peppered grey or white—of the old landowners, the elaborate coiffures of their wives and daughters, the soft young faces of their sons, indolent, sensual, bored. A dozen waiters carefully drilled by Ofelia and Ellen and dressed in blue livery with brass buttons waited on table with only a few mistakes. "No wonder old

Porfirio had European waiters brought in for his grand banquet," Ellen heard the grizzled old man on her right say as one of the waiters dripped wine on the tablecloth as he poured. It was a scene foreign to her, these occasional great shows of ceremony. Invariably these dinners were trying for everyone, and invariably they were colossally dull. She sighed and took another sip of wine, then dutifully made what small talk she could with the white mustache on her left. She longed to ask him what he thought of Zapata's chances of bringing off a redivision of the land, and even more important, what he thought of the depredations of the local outlaw Negrito and his band, but she knew only too well that the old guard frowned on talking politics with women while the young men were bored by the whole subject, never dreaming that all of it really had anything to do with them.

At the far end of the table, so far that he seemed an indistinct, shimmering figure as he stood, Carlos rapped on his glass for silence. "We are gathered tonight to celebrate Elena's and my second anniversary and with it the hundred and second anniversary of Mexico's independence. These are uncertain days, but here is to the peace and prosperity that the coming year will surely bring."

There was a chorus of hear hears and *olés*. Then one by one the men stood and delivered themselves of various toasts: to their hosts, to the putting down of Zapata, to the demise of Orozco's *colorados* in the north, to the capture and hanging of Negrito, to peace and a return to the past. Ellen caught Tom's eye and smiled. He looked almost a stranger, suave in his ruffled shirt front and black tails, but his answering wink was familiar enough. Halfway down the table was Edmundo, still thin and drawn with bitter lines around his mouth. He smiled at her, though, and lifted his glass silently. She noticed that both he and Tom in their toasts stuck to congratulating the anniversary couple.

What an anniversary, she thought unhappily. As the months of her barrenness passed by, Carlos became increasingly distant. He still came to her room from time to time, but their coupling was an act of relief, not love. She had even braved Margarita's knowing smugness—she had four—and consulted a French doctor in Guadalajara about her childlessness. He had poked around with some cold instruments and pronounced that there seemed to be no structural reason for her failure to conceive, that if she were only patient, a child would probably finally arrive. She had even asked Edmundo, who didn't know, if Carlos had fathered any children out of wedlock before they were married. She felt a failure as a woman and even as a lover, and this in turn led to her wild pranks like the race today that had so infuriated Carlos.

"I don't care anymore what you do when there's no one around, Elena," he had said coldly, "but don't ever again make a spectacle of yourself in front of my friends."

Then to her astonishment he had acted to everyone else as if the whole escapade had been his own idea. "I wanted you all to see what marvellous horsewomen they have in California," he said fatuously. Later, when one of the white mustaches asked him in a low voice about whether he didn't consider it dangerous, not to say indecent, for a woman to ride astride, she was startled and angered to overhear him laugh and wink, "You don't know what you've missed, Don Alfredo—the nights after such riding women are marvellously receptive..."

"Why, you sly dog!" The old man exploded with laughter. "And to think you told me all these years too late!" He clapped Carlos on the back and went off chuckling.

When the men had retired to their port, cigars, and politics, the women trailed into the sitting room for coffee. To her annoyance, Ellen was trapped by Doña Ana, whose grey hair was piled in an unlikely structure on top of her head, bristling with jewelled combs.

"I went to Dr. Federico Lara Olmedo in Guadalajara,

and he told me that cold compresses soaked with essence of juniper would cure my headaches at once."

Dear heaven, thought Ellen, don't tell me the old fool has been soaking her head in gin.... She suppressed a smile.

"The headaches are much better now," Doña Ana went on inexorably, "but he could do nothing about the shooting pains I have in my back. They start between my shoulder blades and go down to my lower back, and my dear..."

Ellen stopped listening. Didn't these women care that their world was on the edge of an abyss, and yet their maids and cooks and petty medical symptoms were all they seemed interested in. She was watching the girl Edmundo was engaged to, a shy, rather pretty little thing, a bit too plump for real beauty.

"My nights are long and frightening," he explained to Ellen, "and I need something soft and warm and affectionate and undemanding to take the cold emptiness from my bed and from my heart. I will always love you, Elena, but I am fond of my little *periquita*, my little parakeet, and I will be much gentler and nicer with her than any of those *macho* stallions she would marry otherwise."

Her thoughts were interrupted by a change of subject on the part Doña Ana. "When I rang the bell that night and she didn't come, I went to her room to find that she was gone and all her things with her. Heaven only knows what she stole besides. I wanted Victor to mount a posse and go after her, but he said she and her *novio* Roberto were probably in the mountains by now because whatever else they took, they stole two good horses. Roberto was the eighth man to run off like that, though we managed to catch and hang one, but Carmen was the first woman. Victor says it won't be long before the *vigilantes* from the *haciendas* hand this Negrito as well; he's nothing but a common criminal."

"Where does he come from?" Ellen asked. "Was he

always an outlaw?" She remembered what Edmundo had told her about Villa, that he had killed the *hacendado's* son who had raped Villa's sister, then escaped into the hills and turned outlaw.

Doña Ana shrugged. "Who knows? He's obviously of very low breeding or his complexion wouldn't be so dark, and they say he has a scarred face and only one eye besides." She shuddered. "A dreadful man."

"Did you hear what happened at the *Rueda Grande*?" Dona Esperanza, a roly-poly little woman with gold teeth, asked. When they all shook their heads, she triumphantly plunged on. "Negrito and his men came riding in when the family was in France and the administrator in Zacatecas to see about some feed, and they burned the stables and feed barns and would have burned the house if they could have set it alight. As it was, they stripped the place of everything worth carrying off and a lot that wasn't. What would anyone like them want with tasseled lampshades, I ask you? Anyway, not one of the house servants or field workers so much as sneezed in defense of the place—in fact, a lot of them joined the band on horses stolen from the *Rueda* stables, including Don Jorge's favorite palomino stallion. When the administrator got back, he knew he would probably be dismissed when the family returned, so he shot a few workers out of sheer temper and took off with what little of value was left. My Eduardo took an overseer from our *maguey* fields and put him to running the place until the Alvarados can get back."

As the women gave appropriate exclamations of horror and astonishment, Ellen wondered how long it would be before Negrito felt strong enough to take on the better run ranches. Up until now he had confined himself to *haciendas* where the owning families were never there and the administrators weak or bullies or both, but he would soon run through those, and meanwhile most of the remaining families lived on their land and hadn't been away

more than briefly for years.

"My Victor says," Doña Ana was not about to be upstaged for long, "that he hopes that dreadful man and his gang *do* show up at *Tres Hermanos* because that will be the end of him."

The end of whom, Ellen wondered uneasily.

Later on, as she stood talking to Edmundo and Leticia, his little parakeet, she felt a warm firm hand on the back of her neck.

"The first dance, I believe, is mine," Carlos said, and they sailed off on the only waltz that the little village band of two guitars and a battered trumpet knew. "Every time I'm so angry with you I feel like strangling you," he went on, holding her indecently close, "you make yourself so beautiful I can't keep my hands off you. There's not a man in the room who doesn't envy me."

Though neither his speech nor his dancing showed it, she had had enough experience with him by now to know that more than enough to drink had broken down his inhibitions and dissolved his prudishness. He proceeded for the rest of the evening, even when he was dancing with someone else, to court her with his eyes and his expression and often enough his hands, until they were both in a well-nigh unbearable state of sexual tension. She had had a bit to drink herself, and she giggled as she wondered what all those white mustaches and jewelled combs would think if she took off her clothes right there on the dance floor. Why oh why couldn't Carlos be like this all the time, admiring instead of always disapproving. She surreptitiously rubbed the back of his neck with her thumb as they were dancing to the same waltz again.

"Stop that, *querida*, or I'll have you right here on the floor," he murmured in her ear.

"I think that would be absolutely delightful," she said in a loud voice. "In fact, I can't think of anything I would like more."

"Witch!" he whispered, but he was grinning.

The number of overnight guests had caused her to give up her bedroom to Doña Ana and Victor, so going to bed together in Carlos's room was a foregone conclusion. It had been several weeks since the last time, and they were only just barely out of their clothes before Carlos grabbed her, the act over almost before it began. He sighed and fell asleep with his hand on her breast, for once making no fuss about nightgowns. She lay there feeling disappointed and angry, for though he would probably have her again the following morning, it would be even more perfunctory.

Later on, she could not remember where the idea had come from, but she found herself pushing him over onto his back and then looking at him as he lay there. The fire still flickered in the bedroom fireplace, keeping the room warm and throwing a fitful light across the bed. Gently she pulled the covers down until she could look at all of him. All but naked of any hair, he looked like a marvelous statue carved out of some glowing earth-colored rock. Tentatively she ran her hand down his chest, over his ribs. He didn't stir. We'll see if he'll stay asleep, she thought rebelliously, and she set to work to excite him by every means she already knew and some that had been whispered among the faster girls at the finishing school.

First it was his breathing that changed, then it became obvious that his body was responding again. All at once his eyes opened and he looked at her as she knelt over him, naked. In silence he began to caress her in return, a long slow mutual lovemaking that ended by lifting them far above where they had ever been with each other and left both of them satiated in a way they had never experienced together. This time it was she who fell asleep on his shoulder. The last thing she remembered was hearing the distant booming of thunder over the far mountains and the splash of rain water cascading off their own tile roof.

When she woke the next morning, languorous and

happy, the sun was already up and he was gone. She dressed slowly and sipped the coffee Lupita had brought, planning the day ahead. Their guests would all be leaving this morning, for no one wanted to stay away from their *haciendas* for long these days. This evening before supper at nine she would have plenty of time to make her rounds of the village. She always dreaded it after a holiday because there would be women and children with the marks of beatings. The women would beg her not to tell Señor Tomás, for they knew that their men would then be beaten themselves. She wouldn't tell him, but he would take inventory and know anyway. This way, by not going until the evening of the day after the fiesta, she was relieved of the charge of complicity and tale bearing.

"Why do you beat them?" she asked Tom once. "The same ones always do it; when they're drunk they don't know what they're doing."

"Now there are only four or five," Tom replied. "When I came, there were thirty or more. Then, there were sometimes broken bones, serious concussions. Now it's mainly just bruises. If you can think of another way to get to them, tell me. I'm willing to try any suggestion you have." His blue eyes regarded her intently.

"I give up." She smiled sadly. "It's just that it seems wrong somehow to be as violent as they are."

"I thought once of taking some privilege away from them," he offered, "but they don't have any to take."

"Tom, why are you doing what you're doing? You don't believe in it, do you?"

His expression was unfathomable. "To help Carlos. If it hadn't been for him, it might be me, not Negrito, terrorizing the neighborhood." He gave a brief smile. "I thought that with time we could perhaps change things here. With the better stock and the fields planted to something besides just corn, I saw that we could then afford to pay a decent wage and still have plenty of profit

for overselves. It hinged mainly on the cattle. If we could get a small purebred herd going, we could sell them all over central and southern Mexico and upgrade our own range stock as well. Now we may be running out of time. The oldest calves of the heifers we brought in from the Flying O near Sacramento and the seed bulls we got from your father are yearlings, and they won't be saleable as breeding stock until next year."

"Can't Carlos raise the men's wages now?"

"He put all his loose cash into the new livestock. They don't come cheap, and he got the best. The rest of his assets are invested mainly in the United States and to liquify them right now he would have to sell at a tremendous loss."

"Can't he at least tell the people what his plans are?"

"And what do you think would happen if for some reason things didn't work out as we planned? Better not to make promises."

They both stood looking down the hill then at the field of permanent pasture irrigated by the river, where a bunch of dark red cows with white faces and their calves fed on the rich grass.

All day she never saw Carlos alone, and somehow she could never catch his eye to smile conspiratorially. Right after they said gooobye to the last of the house guests, he went off again, saying over his shoulder not to hold lunch for him. She thought to lie down after lunch, but Lupita told her that María Ramos in the village had been in labor since yesterday midday, and the midwife had given up. Ellen picked up her bag, and they got the horses that would take them to the village.

They rode for several miles over bare hillsides covered with short green grass and dotted with clumps of brush. Already there was a carpet of tiny bright wildflowers that would become a solid sheet of them in October just at the last of the rains. Then on a large flat below they saw the

village, small whitewashed adobe huts with window and door openings and thatched roofs made of reeds from the edge of the river. Their floors were packed earth, and most of them had a kind of fireplace in the middle of the floor that blackened the whole inside of the house. Only a few could afford an outside kitchen walled with cane to let the smoke out.

The woman lay on a thin *petate* mat, her face pale and sweating. There must have been seven or eight women crowded in the small room, plus a number of children. Somebody was praying, but there was no sign of the priest.

"I want some water boiled, plenty of it," Ellen said.

"They've already done it," Lupita said, smiling. "They know enough now to have it ready when they send for you."

Ellen knelt by the woman finally and examined her. As she had feared, when she reached in to see how the baby was positioned, she touched a knee instead of the head she hoped for. She shook her head.

"The baby is turned around," she explained to her fascinated audience. "I don't know if I can turn it or not."

There had been a time when she had tried to clear the women out, but it occurred to her that they might learn something if they watched, and if someone died on her there could be no talk of murder as long as she had witnesses. The trick here would be to turn the child without wrapping the umbilical cord around its neck. That had happened to Rosa once at Las Cruces, and Ellen had never forgotten it.

"There, there," she said automatically as the woman gave a weak, bleating cry, "we'll have it out in no time."

She noticed that at some previous birth the vaginal opening had been badly torn, which made her job easier now, but should be repaired. Slowly she worked the baby around to make a normal presentation, while all the time

the woman gave feeble shrieks and tried to push her away. "Hold her, Lupita. I've almost got it." She could feel the labor contractions along her arm and hoped they would be strong enough to eject the child.

"María, can you hear me?"

The woman stopped mewling and nodded, her eyes wild.

"When I say push down, you push down, hear me? Push hard, as hard as you can. Now, push! More! Still more!"

Once the baby entered the birth canal, it went very fast, for María had had six children already, three of them still living. At last a wizened, bloody little bundle emerged and was wiped off, to find it was a girl.

"All that for a girl," one of the women said disgustedly. María was already asleep and passed the afterbirth without waking. After Ellen left the hut, for it was little more than that, María's husband José came up to her to thank her.

"You have to come to the baptism party," he said, beaming. "We are naming her after you."

Lupita laughed. "There are going to be a lot of Elenas around here," she said. At first the women had objected to having Lupita help. "She is a virgin, and it isn't proper for her to help at a birth."

"She is a woman and she is my companion and assistant," Ellen had insisted. "If you want me, you'll have to have her as well." They had held out for a while, but inevitably there came the case the local midwife couldn't handle. Eventually Ellen managed to train the midwives in such simple procedures as washing their hands first, but they stoutly resisted changing most of their ways.

They came back late for supper and had a pickup meal that Lupita put together from the plentiful leftovers of the night before. Ellen carried her plate into the library where Carlos was going over accounts.

"What do you want?" he asked bluntly, his voice unfriendly.

"What do you mean, what do I want?" Ellen replied foolishly, glazed with weariness. "I was down delivering a breech birth," she added unnecessarily, thinking he might have been annoyed that she hadn't eaten with him. "I just wanted to see you, that's all. I haven't seen you to talk to all day. Last night—"

"I hope to forget last night!"

"You *what*?" She couldn't believe what she was hearing.

"Where did you learn those things? How dared you use them on me?"

"Do you mean to tell me that you're angry because I made love to you for once?"

"Only whores do that," he announced, outraged.

"You didn't call me a whore last night," she lashed out. "You enjoyed yourself thoroughly. What gets into you, Carlos?"

"I was drunk last night," he said sullenly. "I didn't know what I was doing."

"Do I have to get you drunk every time so that you'll please me and not just yourself?" she demanded. "Last night was the best time we've had since that first party at your sister's house. Is it really so much fun to make love as if you were going to the bathroom?"

His face was white. "What are you?" he asked viciously. "No decent woman would do what you did, or speak as you speak!"

"No, I'm not decent, I'm not a lady, I'm not—as Edmundo described his intended—soft and undemanding. I'm a big, strapping, healthy girl, and I'm honest. If you don't like it, and you apparently don't, then give me the money to go back to California." At his expression of dismay, she said shrewdly, "Or will you lose face among your friends? You make me sick!" She went to bed hungry

and angry, but so tired she fell asleep almost at once.

The next day he rode off to Guadalajara without even asking if she wanted to come along, and stayed for three weeks.

"Won't Carlos be upset at your riding by yourself?" Edmundo asked when she went to visit him at the sugar mill.

"When the cat's away, the mice will play," she replied, laughing. "I ride all over by myself now that he's not here. It's like being let out of prison."

Edmundo looked sad. "I'm sorry, Elena. I was afraid something like this would happen. He's headstrong like a little boy, but he'll be back, and probably be secretly very contrite as well."

"His contriteness, secret or otherwise, doesn't interest me. Edmundo, what do people do when they've said things to each other that can never be unsaid? How can Carlos and I look each other in the eye again, let alone love each other?"

"I've never been married, Elena, but time and the will to forgive should be a great help. Maybe he was right to go away for a while."

"Except that I think I know where he's gone. Let's see, would it be to the old senator's wife, or to Louis's mistress?"

"Louis is long gone. You've never forgotten what I told you, have you? Now I'm sorry I said it at all."

"Don't be sorry, Edmundo. As you surmised, Margarita saw to it that I was informed. This way at least I have a clue as to who he's with."

"Seriously, Elena, you shouldn't be riding alone these days. It's not only Negrito, but there are deserters of all kinds wandering past. You could be harmed."

"Edmundo, if it weren't for you and Tom, I would have run off long since. I'm no good for Carlos, everything I do enrages him. He doesn't want a woman, he wants a *muñeca*, a doll."

"There was a time when I think I could have helped you, Elena. I believed so thoroughly in the essential good of mankind that I might have been able to renew your faith, too. But now I know that men are greedy, cruel, and vain unless they are taught different, and sometimes not even then." He spread his hands helplessly.

By the time Carlos returned, she might have told him, but it was another month before she was sure enough to say anything, a month during which they spoke politely but distantly to each other and kept to their separate bedrooms. There were times when she looked at him, aching, and almost tried to break the barrier that separated them, but then she thought of how she would feel if he looked at her in icy silence, and she kept still.

At last she knew she would have to tell him.

It was the middle of November and the grass had browned, in places already showing the bare bones of the scantily clad foothills. She stood waiting as Carlos and Tom rode in during the failing light. She heard the chink of the horses' bits, the creak of the saddles, the sharp clopping of the hoofs. Both men rode straight and easy, unconsciously adjusting to the rhythm of the horses' movement.

"Carlos," she said, "could I see you for a moment after you've unsaddled? I have something important to tell you."

Tom sat his horse looking down at her as Carlos dismounted and said shortly, "All right. I'll be up soon."

When he entered the living room, she had a drink ready for him. "Carlos, we can't go on like this. If I'm to leave, I want to do it now while I can still travel. There should be no problem annulling a civil ceremony here in Mexico."

His glance suddenly became an intent look. "What do you mean, while you can still travel? Have you heard something new of Negrito?"

"No, Carlos. I'm pregnant, *embarazada* as you Mexi-

cans so quaintly put it, and—" She broke off, startled, because his whole demeanor changed so radically she hardly recognized him. The cold stranger was gone, and in his place stood an exultant, triumphant man who looked ten years younger. Dear heaven, she thought, if only I myself could ever have made him look like that!

"Elena! *Querida mía!*" he gasped happily. "Are you sure? How do you feel? Why didn't you tell me? Lupita! Get the *señora* a wrap—and a hot drink. Are you sure you're all right?"

"Slowly, slowly, Carlos," she laughed. "Of course I'm all right. I told you I was a strapping healthy girl, didn't I? I haven't even felt sick to my stomach or had backaches or swollen ankles or any of the things you're supposed to have when you're pregnant." She sipped the hot cocoa Lupita had brought. "The only thing wrong with me is I'm hungry all the time."

Carlos took her gently in his arms and held her, stroking her hair. "We're never going to fight again, *querida*. You'll see, when you're a mother you won't want to do all those crazy things anymore."

She doubted that because of some of those crazy things that she wanted to do right now. Wisely, she said nothing.

7

*At Christmas there was a solid week of over-*cast, and with it came a chill that penetrated to everyone's very bones. Carlos sent men with burros up to the mountains to bring back cut wood and charcoal. They were accompanied by an armed guard led by Tom, but outside of a skirmish with a small ragged band that was clearly not Negrito's, they had no trouble.

"A good thing it wasn't our friend," Tom reported when they returned. "If it had been, they'd have run all over us."

The poinsettias blazed red on the slope in front of the house, while inside it smelled of wood smoke from the fires kept going all day and of pine boughs Tom had brought from the mountains. Overlying all was a smell of cinnamon and baking in preparation for Christmas visitors, for the whole family was invited over the holidays, and there were always casual passersby from the neighboring *haciendas*, come to wish them a *feliz navi-*

dad. Tom's surprise present was a group of six inch high nativity figures he had carved from mesquite: Mary, Joseph, the Child, the three kings, and a dozen assorted animals and shepherds. They set up a Nativity scene using real straw on a table by the tree, also brought from the mountains. It became a game to see who could think of the most ingenious ornaments for the tree, but in the end, tradition seemed to win. Ellen made cookies in the shapes of animals and stars and crescents covered with colored frosting as her contribution, Carlos cut out pieces of bright new tin to hang, and with much hilarity Tom strung balls of colored paper. When they lit the candles and stood back to view their handiwork, they all went dumb with a sudden surge of emotion, and they held hands like children. Ellen could never remember being so happy.

A few nights before Christmas they all went down to the village where the traditional *posadas* were going on. They were offered *canela*, cinnamon coffee laced with cane alcohol, or *ponche*, an unlikely but potent blend of pomegranate juice including the seeds, chocolate, chopped nuts, and of course alcohol. Each night for ten days before Christmas the villagers sang and reenacted the tableau of Joseph and Mary being turned away from the inn. The little houses were decorated with flowers, and many had a bare mesquite bough painted and hung with berries, fruit, and the bright orange parasite that grew on the mesquite trees. The candlelit faces, the chanting song, and the strong feel of centuries-long continuity made the simple rite very impressive. Afterward a pottery bowl covered with paper to look like a giant rooster was hung up and broken by a blindfolded child with a stick. As the candies and fruit provided by Carlos rained down on the ground, the children plunged in a screaming melee to pick up the sweets.

"Did they make the candy?" Ellen asked.

"Some of it. The rest we had brought from Guadalajara," Tom explained.

"Oh, I hope we got them presents, too." When he nodded, smiling, she went on, "We'll bring them down on Christmas Day, or do they give presents Christmas Eve?"

"Neither."

"New Year's Day?"

"Nope." He was grinning and not helping her at all.

At last Carlos enlightened her. "Christmas is a religious occasion, not to be spoiled by giving material things. The gift-giving commemorates the kings bringing presents to the Child, and so we have the Day of the Three Kings on January 6. When you think about it, it makes much more sense than spoiling Christmas with greed."

She was interested to see that while Carlos knew the names of all the men, Tom knew who their wives and even their children were. One of the families had given a *fiesta* that afternoon as godfather and godmother to a newly baptized child, and once the *posada* was over, the *fiesta* took up again unabated. The cheerful crowd began to shout to Carlos and Tom, urging them to dance, and at last they came into the cleared area along with two of the village girls and launched into one of those foot-stamping, skirt-swirling traditional Mexican dances that were like re enactments of a courtship. The men clasped their hands behind them, and standing straight and tall, their heads tipped proudly back, they stamped their way up to the women without touching them. The women played hard to get, tossing their wide skirts until their knees could be seen, smiling, teasing, promising, the men proud, arrogant, dominating. Every move was symbolic of the pervading sexuality that underlay the double-edged gaiety and violence that was Mexico.

As the New Year drew them into 1913, Ellen found that as her figure softened and bloomed, she herself softened

in her demands on herself, on Carlos, on life itself. She began to feel languid, relaxed, and things that had taxed her patience before no longer seemed to have the power to upset her.

"Shouldn't you rest more, *querida*?" Carlos would ask. "I'm sure you're not supposed to be riding still."

"Oh Carlos," she laughed, "the women in the village just like the women at Las Cruces work hard right up until the baby is born. Occasionally a birth happens right out in the fields, did you know that? It's afterward they take the time off to rest, though why sitting in bed in those dark, damp little houses for forty days doesn't bore them to death, I'll never know. Actually, it would be better for them if they did do more, but I guess it's the only vacation the poor things ever get."

The greatest difference was in her relationship with Carlos. He had become gentle, tender, thoughtful in a way she had never seen in him before. He always had time for her now, and he tried to think up things she would enjoy. If their sex life lacked the excitement generated by their former clashes, it made up for it in the tenderness and depth of their physical and emotional involvement. She wondered how she could ever have thought him cold and arrogant and unfeeling. Anticipation of the birth of his child had pierced the armor of his masculinity, and she had become the mother as well as the wife.

In January Carlos went to Guadalajara to have most of his funds shifted to the United States. "Madero's government can't last," he said to Tom, "and money here is likely to become worthless. I can't afford to lose what little cash I have left. Victor and Jorge are buying more land instead, but I don't need any more land." He came back saying that Margarita's husband Martín, who had just returned from Mexico City, had told him that within a couple of months there would be a change of government, but no one seemed sure who would be President. "It's apparently

the generals doing it," Carlos reported, "but there seems to be a scramble. The money is on Porfirio's nephew Felix, in which case things may settle down."

When he saw Ellen alone, he announced to her that their love making had to cease until after the baby was born lest it harm him.

"Who might be harmed, you or the baby?"

If Carlos had paid more attention, he might have seen the old dangerous glint in her eyes, but he plowed on, noticing nothing. "Margarita says that it would be foolhardy to have relations with you and endanger both you and the child. She also says that under no circumstances should you be riding."

"I should have known! Margarita has tried to give me trouble at every turn. The only reason she hasn't been more successful is that you haven't seen much of her. I've done a lot more nursing than Margarita, and I'll be the one to say when we should stop." She paused. "That is, unless I've become unattractive to you."

He looked fleetingly uncomfortable, then smiled. "You should know better than that, *querida*. Never have you been so beautiful."

It was true. Despite the swelling below her waist, still hardly perceptible when she was dressed, there was a bloom and mellowness and maturity to her looks now that made her even more handsome than she had been before. Yet somehow time went by and she realized that he hadn't come in to her since returning from the city. The first of February he went again, and still again in the middle of February.

"They're shelling Mexico City," he reported. "The revolt is on. Madëro has put Huerta, of all people, in command—it's like putting the fox to guard the hen coop."

When Ellen would ride down to the village with Lupita, for the first time she sensed a restlessness on the part

of the people. There were a few, like Odón of the mutilated burro, who were openly hostile, scowling and remaining silent when she greeted them. Once, as she and Lupita went out at night to deliver a child, she heard horses and the clinking of bits.

Lupita was frightened. "We should go back."

Ellen herself was alarmed, but she thought of the woman in labor bleeding to death and decided to go on. "Nonsense," she soothed Lupita. "There are only friendly people around here. Sometimes the police look for run-aways." She knew, though, that the police were making themselves scarce out in the countryside, where bandit gangs like Negrito's grew bolder by the day.

As they entered the village, it looked deserted. Usually there was someone out to meet them. As she entered Clara's house, she was startled to see Clara tending the fire.

"Was it a false labor then?" she asked, puzzled.

"No, *señora*, it is she who needs you." She pointed to a *petate* mat where a woman Ellen had never seen before lay pale and sweating, clutching her stomach.

"Who is she?" Ellen asked, opening her bag and motioning to Lupita, who looked thoroughly frightened.

"Don't ask," Clara advised. "She is a woman in trouble, that will have to be enough."

"And if I can't help her?" Ellen said.

"Then God help us all," Clara replied, crossing herself.

The woman was bleeding a lot, but it wasn't the fatal spurting that meant a torn placenta and certain death. Ellen examined her thoroughly.

"The position is good, but I think the child may be too big. She'll have to have a doctor do a Caesarean if it is."

Clara paled. "There is no way to get her to a doctor, you know that."

"Isn't there one in Santa Rosa? They told me a young man set up practice there last year."

Clara shook her head. "She can't be taken to Santa Rosa."

"Why not? I'll have Jorge get the buggy out—"

"No, *señora*," Clara broke in. "It is more dangerous for her to be taken there than to take her chances here, doctor or no doctor. Do what you can."

"She is Negrito's?"

Clara nodded. "Not his, but one of his captain's."

"Would it be best to save her or save the child, if it comes to that?"

"I think it is better to save her. What would they do with a newborn baby where they go? They would have to leave it anyway."

In the end, she managed to extract the baby in one piece, making herself ignore the woman's hoarse screams, but he had died, smothered by his long stay in the birth canal. The woman was badly torn, and Ellen had to sew her up. "Tell them that the stitches should come out in six days. I think she'll be all right if she doesn't infect."

Clara crossed herself again. "*Ojalá*," she said, "for all our sakes."

On the way back, Ellen and Lupita heard nothing this time, but the next morning the woman was gone, along with Odón and three other men, their first defections from among the Santa Cruz men.

When Carlos got back and heard about the desertions, he was beside himself, so angry that by unspoken agreement Ellen and Tom refrained from telling him about the woman from Negrito's band.

"Victor and Paco are right," Carlos stormed. "To treat these animals with kindness only spoils them."

"You only lost four," Tom pointed out reasonably, "and all four were troublemakers. Let them make trouble now for Negrito, I'd say good riddance. But Carlos, I don't think you should be gone again right now. Obviously Negrito is in the area, and he seems to pick for

choice *haciendas* with absent owners. He has his own spy system, and he knows perfectly well that without the owner around, the workers simply melt away at the first sign of trouble."

Tom was looking directly at Carlos, an indefinable challenge in his bearing. Carlos's eyes shifted first. "Well, I don't have to go right away," he vacillated, "but Martín and I are in the midst of a rather complicated investment transaction, and my presence will be needed again before long."

If Ellen hadn't known better, she would have thought that Tom's answering expression was one of scorn, but he said nothing, only nodded shortly and walked off. What was going on? Without money, and lots of it, the men could never be paid a decent wage. She knew Tom was very much in favor of this and yet he didn't seem to want Carlos to go. Surely he didn't think Carlos was afraid to stay; she had never known Carlos to be afraid of anything. She shrugged. Men, who could understand them?

It was almost a week later when a lone rider on a lathered horse galloped up and yelled, "Madero is dead, assassinated!"

"That's done it," muttered Tom, who had been up at the house going over accounts with Carlos. The two men ran down to the stables to talk to the messenger. In the kitchen Ellen and Ofelia stared at each other, then Ofelia burst into tears.

"Oh, the sainted man!" she cried. "He was going to see to it that my Manuel and I would be given land. And now he's dead and we will never have our little piece of ground."

Ellen found it hard to believe that, after all Madero's vacillation and refusal to get rid of the greater part of the old Diaz government, anyone could seriously think he would upset the status quo by redividing private land to give to the peons. Only Zapata was wild enough to pro-

pose it seriously: total confiscation of the estates unfriendly to the revolution and confiscation of a third from the friendly ones. Looking out over the Santa Cruz land, she knew which third would go; the fertile river valley, of course, which would be put back into corn that within five years would ruin the soil. Yet if all of the people here looked to Madero for something like that, they wouldn't like it at all that he had been killed. She heard the clatter of hoofs then, and saw the messenger go galloping off on a fresh horse. Taking off her apron, she started to walk down toward the stables.

As she approached, she could hear angry voices coming from the tackroom.

"Carlos, you've got to stay here! Madero raised their hopes for land, but not the simplest peon is going to think that Huerta will give him so much as a centimeter. If we're ever going to have trouble, it'll be now."

"Nothing's going to happen here, I tell you, but I've got to get to Guadalajara. They could storm the bank, or Margarita's house, or—who knows what they'll do. When I come back, I'll come back to stay."

"When you come back, it will be too late! What's the matter, Carlos, afraid another Frenchman will cut you out?"

There was the sound of a blow, and Carlos came storming out holding one hand with the other. He brushed past her as if he didn't see her. She entered the tackroom where Tom was leaning against a saddle on its rack and rubbing his jaw.

He looked at her and smiled uncertainly. "That Carlos packs a wallop. If I'd known you were out there, I wouldn't have said it."

"It's one of his old flames, isn't it?" She made a face. "I guess I've known for a while, all those trips to town. He's got it in his head I mustn't be molested while I'm pregnant, and his *macho* won't let him practice abstinence. I

suppose I should feel lucky he didn't pick somebody from the village here. It's all right, Tom—I don't know why I thought he'd be any different. I won't leave him now, if that's what you're afraid of."

"I have to hand it to you, Ellen, you've got guts," Tom said. "Just remember, it doesn't mean as much to him as it would to you or me; it hardly means anything, in fact."

"In that case he certainly is in a big hurry to leave his *hacienda* to the bandits, not to mention his unborn child," she commented dryly. "Thank you for trying, Tom."

"Before Carlos goes, I've got to get over and talk Edmundo and Lety into staying here for a while. It'll be safer for all of us."

"Let me go with you, Tom," she said suddenly, "please? I—I don't want to face him just now."

"You change your clothes and I'll saddle the horses," he said, picking a halter off its nail to bring her mare out.

As they set out, he said, "That's strange, there're *zapi-lotes*, vultures, sailing around over there. When we get back I'll have to check and make sure none of the calves got hung up in the wire or something."

Except in the valley, the land was dry, the yellow February grass sparse now. The one rain in January had done little but settle the dust, and she knew that in another month or so the hot weather would arrive, parching man and plant and animal alike until the glorious arrival of the rains in late May or early June. She wondered if they would be there to see it.

As they rode into the upper part of the valley where the sugar cane was grown, they saw more vultures wheeling slowly and gracefully over something near the river.

"Maybe it's out of the way," he said, "but this time I think I'd better see what it is."

He broke his horse out of a walk and they cantered over toward the river, following a path through the cane alongside an irrigation ditch. On the banks of the river

was a broad sandy strip dotted with water-smoothed stones left from the summer spates. Among the stones lay a naked woman prone, her buttocks and legs smeared with blood on which the flies had already lighted. When they turned her over, they saw with horror it was Lety. Her eyes glinted sightlessly between half-open lids, and her lips were broken and bloody, drawn back in a kind of snarl to show broken off stumps of teeth. One breast was cut off.

"Jesus Christ," Tom muttered. He looked around at the sandy bottom. "She must have got away and they caught up with her here. How long would you say she'd been dead?"

Ellen was thankful he didn't go through the farce of telling her not to look. By treating her like an adult human being, he stilled the brief flash of hysteria that for a moment threatened her. She took the dead girl's hand and flexed the fingers with some difficulty, then felt her back with the palm of her hand. "It's hard to say because she's been lying out in the sun, and even this time of the year it's hot in the river bottom in the middle of the day. I'd say at least for three or four hours, though. She's pretty stiff. Poor Lety, she should have had a dozen children." Ellen looked dry-eyed at Tom then. "Edmundo's dead, too, isn't he?"

"I think he must be, but if there's the faintest chance he's hurt but still alive, we've got to see. According to the tracks, from here they crossed the river and went toward the mountains; I doubt they left anyone alive."

As they approached the sugar mill, they could hear the muted squeaking of the great water wheel. Ellen was all at once hopeful, for there were no vultures. "Wait here," Tom said, cocking his rifle, "and if anything happens, run like hell. Your mare can outrun anything they have."

She followed him at a distance, though, incapable of sitting quietly waiting to hear what she knew she must

hear. He was sitting on his horse, still as a statue, when she came up on him. She followed his gaze to see a caricature of Edmundo, head cocked to one side as if listening, as he himself put it, to some obscene joke. His body turned slowly on the rope around his neck, the dappled shade of the tree making shifting patterns of light and shadow on his head and shoulders.

Time jolted to a stop and from then on went in fits and starts. Sometimes they seemed to move as if walking under water and at others to move jerkily like puppets. They cut him down and buried him, but left two other bodies that were sprawled out on the ground.

"We've got to get back and organize a defense. I hope to God Carlos had sense enough to wait for us before taking off."

"Why didn't they burn the house and barns and mill here?" she asked, knowing that this had bothered her from the beginning. Maybe after they chased Lety, they figured it wasn't worth it to go back.

"Let's say I hope it wasn't because they didn't want to warn us at the main ranch," Tom said grimly, putting spurs to his horse.

They left Lety where she lay, cutting across a loop of the river and galloping for the distant buildings. Afterward Ellen's memory was that they had ridden for days, but it could only have been an hour, more or less. The horses were blowing hard by the time they clattered into the stable yard. No one appeared from the house, and when they called, there was no answering shout. Fearfully they went through the great front entrance and walked from empty room to empty room. There was no sign of anyone, not Carlos, nor the servants, nor Lupita, nor even the dogs.

"Now I hope he *did* run off to Guadalajara," Tom said. "We'd better go to the village and see if we can get help."

They rode down past the now fading poinsettias to the

valley bottom and took the lower path toward the village. Long before they came to the field of permanent pasture they knew something was wrong, not only because of the vultures, but also there was a smell in the air as of something on the verge of going rotten. When they reached the field, Ellen thought she was going to be sick. Every cow and calf there had been brutally butchered: On a few, haunches and backs had been removed entirely, but most of them had been killed wantonly. She had the sensation again of being under water, and incongruously there flashed across her mind the day she had ridden waves with the boys at Coxo in an innocent sunlit world on another planet.

"Are you all right?" Tom gripped her arm. "Don't give out on me now, you've done fine so far."

They rode slowly on toward the village, now almost afraid to get there. "They did that only partly for fun," Tom said in a low voice. "I think it was to keep us off their backs until they were through with the sugar mill. They didn't know we wouldn't find the cattle until afterward."

At the last of the trees, they dismounted and crept forward. There in front of them was the very tableau they had hoped not to see. Two men were holding Carlos, who had a thin trickle of blood dripping from the corner of his mouth. In front of him on a black horse was a rider dressed all in black, from his sombrero to his boots. On his chest were crossed cartridge belts, and he held a rifle in his hand. The huge hat shaded his face so that his features were only dimly delineated. In his mouth was a large cigar from which rose a delicate trail of blue smoke. They were in time to see Carlos yank himself suddenly free and lunge at the rider, trying to drag him from his horse. Without even dropping his cigar, the rider calmly raised his rifle and clubbed Carlos across the head, and as he staggered back another man came out of the crowd of strangers and clubbed him again with the butt of his pistol.

"Shame on you, Odón, I think you hit him too hard," the rider said mockingly. With his rifle he leaned down and prodded Carlos over on his back. Whatever he saw seemed to satisfy him, and he turned his horse, lifting his arm high.

"Whoever isn't with us is against us!" he shouted. "If you want to be poor, if you want to be landless, if you want to be dead, then oppose us! We've one more place to hit today, and then we're coming back. This will make a good headquarters for the time being."

While he was talking, his men got their horses from the children who had been holding them, and they clattered down the village street and out the other side at a hard gallop.

"Quick!" Tom whispered, and ran stealthily back through the trees to where they had tethered the horses. "We've only got a couple of hours to take what we must, get out of here, and get a decent start."

"But what about Carlos? What if he's not dead?"

"On our way out, if he's still lying there, we'll see. We can't do it now or the villagers may decide to hold us hostage as a sign of good faith to Negrito."

They packed three pairs of saddle bags with smoked ham, dried beans, flour, sugar, and coffee. They took three warm coats and three bedrolls. "We'll drop the extra coat and bedroll if he's dead. The food we may need more than we think if we can't get through to Guadalajara."

At the stable Tom mounted his tired horse and went out to the holding field, where he rounded up three of the four specially bred mules, all of them over sixteen hands and heavily muscled.

"You mean I can't take Luz?" she demanded, jolted out of her shocked stupor. The mare seemed her last link with reality as opposed to nightmare.

"The first strangers we met would take her from us. No, Ellen, we're going as peasants, not royalty—it's our only chance. If the burros weren't so far away, we'd take them

instead, but these will have to do."

They saddled and mounted the two mules, leading the third with a plain saddle on him. At the trees they stopped once more and dismounted, creeping forward until they could see the village. Carlos was no longer sprawled out on the ground, nor was there any sign of life among the huddle of adobe houses.

"I'm going to ask a hard thing of you, Ellen. I want you to go to the house of someone you know well, someone you've helped. Find out what happened to Carlos, and if it seems all right, signal me and I'll come. I want us to get different clothes. We wouldn't last to the next *hacienda* dressed this way, and the next *hacienda* is where Negrito was going."

Ellen nodded obediently. She felt like a mechanical doll as she plodded out toward the village, the late afternoon sun hot on her back. She was past all feeling, past even thinking. Mechanically she stopped at María's door, heard a baby's cry inside that was quickly smothered, and pushed aside the tattered *serape* that hung in the doorway.

María and her mother and the baby all three were crouched on the floor staring at her. There was no sign of José or of the other children, but stretched out along the wall was Carlos.

"It's all right," Ellen whispered, "it's only me." She went over to Carlos. "He's dead, *verdad*?"

María shook her head. "But I think he will be soon. You shouldn't have come here," she added urgently.

The old woman clutched at María's arm, silencing her, but Ellen paid no attention. She stood looking down at Carlos, all emotion drained from her. His face was grey and still, as if carved in stone. The trickle of blood had been wiped from the corner of his mouth, but she saw there was more that had come from his ear and dried on his neck. Was this still, dying creature really someone with whom she had fought and made love and laughed?

She turned away, a mechanical woman with no thought or feeling.

"Don Tomás is outside with the mules. Can you give us different clothes?" she managed to ask.

María nodded, her frightened eyes flicking involuntarily toward Carlos. Mentally Ellen shrugged. He would die soon and María would bury him and he would cease to be an embarrassment. She moved to the door, looked up and down the empty street, and waved to Tom. When she came back in, it was to find that neither María nor her mother had moved.

Tom ducked in the doorway, gave the frightened María a glance, and with an exclamation spotted Carlos lying on the floor. He moved swiftly over to him, feeling for his pulse with one hand and for breath with the other. "*Agua!*" he snapped. "And a cloth." Tenderly he bathed Carlos's face, cleaned his ear and neck.

Improbably Carlos's eyes opened. He smiled. "Ah, Tomás," he said clearly in Spanish, "that cow was a brute, wasn't she?"

"How do you feel?" Tom asked.

"My head hurts. *Ay Diós*, but I have the grandmother of headaches."

Tom turned to Ellen. "Get clothes. We've got to get out of here."

"We're taking him with us?" she asked, startled.

"Of course we're taking him with us. If they found him here, they'd not only kill him, but María and her mother and the baby as well. Now get clothes, everyday peon's clothes."

Luckily María's husband had gone off to Negrito in his best clothes, and they dressed Carlos in the white pajama-like cotton shirt and pants tied at the waist and ankles that were worn in the fields.

"I'll have to ask María to get another outfit from somewhere else for me," Tom said. "We'll pay you," he reassured María.

Ellen had just picked up a small pottery bowl of water Tom had used to bathe Carlos and was going to the doorway with it when the *serape* was jerked from its fastenings and in the doorway stood Odón, grinning.

"I'm not so stupid after all, am I?" he asked, tapping his head with the fingers of one hand while holding a pistol in the other. "I thought that where Don Carlos was, you would be," he said to Tomás, who was standing with his hand impossibly far from his gun. "I have my plans for you—and for you, too, *gringa*. I need a woman to cook for me where we go and to warm by bed. You will do very nicely, I think."

Tom made an involuntary movement, and Odón swung the pistol full on him. "I will shoot you now if I have to, *cabrón*, but I want to play a little with you first. Take off your gun, slowly now, and throw it to me. Then you can take off your pants. *Córrale!* Hurry up!"

The horrors of the day had added up until Ellen's nerves were at the breaking point, and she knew she could stand no more. She wasn't sure what Odón had in mind in making Tom remove his pants, but she could make several guesses, none of them pleasant. The thought of having to watch him tortured in front of her eyes until he shrieked like the women whose children she had delivered was more than she could bear. Without stopping to consider the effect, she hurled the bowl with its contents of water and wet cloth at Odón, at the same time launching herself at him. By sheer chance the sopping rag plastered itself momentarily across his face as the bowl, too light to inflict much damage, struck him a glancing blow on the cheek, and his shot went wild, breaking a large pottery bowl hanging on the wall behind her. Tom, who had his gun by the barrel ready to toss it at Odón's feet, took a quick step toward the two struggling people who looked as if they were engaged in some macabre dance, and brought the butt of his pistol down with a sickening thud on Odón's head. He dropped like a stone, and from the

glistening red hole in the top of his head a few white shards of bone could be seen.

"Get dressed, quick!" Tom said. "There could be more of them out there."

"There are no more," María said. "He alone stayed back to trap you. He has my children," she added simply, which explained her lending herself to the scheme.

"Can you get rid of him?"

She nodded, a look of satisfaction on her Indian face. "They will never find him."

Tom meanwhile was stripping Odón of his field clothes. For a Mexican, Odón was large, and the pants were nearly long enough. When Tom had put on the crossed cartridge belts, the *serape* over his shoulder, and the large *sombrero*, he looked transformed. Only his blue eyes proclaimed him as other than a renegade field hand, and a tough one at that.

Like most of the women who lived on a diet of *tortillas* and beans and had a child a year, María was fat, so her blouse fit, but the skirt was short, coming only to Ellen's calves, and it had to be pinned at the waist. All three of them wore *huaraches*, the hallmark of the peon. In the unlikely event a peon moved up in the world and got a little money, the first thing he did was to buy a pair of shoes or boots. Tom tied their boots together with a piece of *maguay* fiber to take with them.

"If we have to walk any distance," he explained grimly, "we'd never make it in someone else's *huaraches*. We'll take our clothes, too. When we get to Guadalajara, we'll need them until we can buy more."

Tom gave María a couple of gold coins and they left, supporting Carlos on either side. He had said no more, but he was conscious and could walk surprisingly well. When they got to the mules, they put the clothes and boots in the saddlebags and mounted, picking their way around the village through the last of the dusk.

8

A cool night wind smelling of sun dried grass blew across their path, and they stopped to put on their *serapes*. Ellen had taken one of the blanket-like *serapes* with a slit for the head to go through in addition to Maria's *rebozo* shawl, and now she was glad. When they told Carlos to put on his *serape*, he just looked at them, and they had to do it for him. Tom tied Carlos on his mule, and led it.

The mules went well, and that night they made almost thirty miles. "We'll lay up in the daytime," Tom said. "Mexicans don't like to travel at night, so we should have the road to ourselves."

As the first light began to outline the mountains, they turned off the road and made their way past a grove of willows that indicated a stream and on into a brushy thicket, forcing the mules to break their way through. At last they came to a small clearing where they dismounted and set up their camp. Tom made a small fire, and while Ellen cooked their only eggs and some ham, he untied the

bedrolls, which were nothing but thin straw-stuffed pads with blankets for covers that the men had used occasionally for hunting forays in the mountains in happier times. She heated *tortillas* on the edge of the fire, and they rolled pieces of egg and ham in them, bolting them down in their hunger almost without chewing. They had to feed Carlos, who seemed able to chew and swallow but was seemingly incapable of the initiative needed to wrap the food in his *tortilla* and bring it to his mouth.

"What do you think?" Ellen asked, indicating Carlos with a nod of her head.

Tom shrugged. "If he were a horse, I'd put him in a dark stall and keep him quiet. We can't even do that."

She thought of the proud, elegant Carlos she had known before and for the first time felt like crying. He sat huddled in his *serape* staring vacantly at the fire, his cheeks unshaven and the swelling at the corner of his mouth where he had been struck making his face look a little lopsided. She felt love and pity suddenly surge into the dark clanging emptiness where her feelings had once been, and she took his inert hand in hers and laid it against her cheek. She sat that way a long time while Tom slowly sipped his hot coffee and watched them somberly.

The sun woke her, striking across her closed eyes. She glanced over at the bedroll next to her where they had put Carlos. It was empty! "Tom! Tom, wake up!"

He sat up with his gun out pointing at her.

"It's Carlos, he's gone."

"Oh Christ," Tom groaned, "we'll have to go after him. If he makes the road, someone will see him for sure."

Drunk with weariness, they checked the mules and then followed where the crushed grass said he had gone. He had apparently crawled through the brush, and half an hour later they found him sleeping under the willows beside the stream, one hand actually trailing in the water.

"Tell you what," Tom said. "I think we'll be safe

enough here, and it's easier to carry the bedrolls here than to carry Carlos back through that brush. There's better fodder for the mules, and shelter from the sun. Come on."

"I've got an idea," Ellen said tentatively later on. "If he keeps wandering off while we're asleep we'll never get any rest." She put two of the pads side by side. "If the three of us sleep close together like this with him in the middle, there'll be nowhere he can go."

The bodily contact may have comforted him, for he made no further attempt to wander off, and slept quietly the rest of the day. That evening they filled their canteens from the spring and continued on their way, chewing on the venison jerky and stale *tortillas* as they went. The wind had dropped, and the night turned almost warm. Above them glittered a vast sheet of stars, while the unpaved road shone palely in front of them. The mysterious night world closed about them, held at bay only by the clinking of the bits, the creak of the saddles, and the muffled clop of the mules' hoofs in the powdery dust churned fine by innumerable wheels and feet of animals and men.

It was still dark when they made their way down the long steep side of the huge *barranca* formed by the rushing Santiago River far below. All at once Tom stopped.

"There's somebody up ahead," he whispered. "Stay here and I'll try to find out who it is." He disappeared into the darkness for what seemed like hours.

He came back as suddenly as he had left. "We're out of luck. They've got the bridge over the river barricaded and they've put out sentries."

"Who?" Ellen asked, exasperated.

"Oh, not Negrito, if that's what you're thinking, but not *federales*, either. It looks to me as if another bunch of self-styled revolutionaries are out to charge *mordida*. If I thought it were only a bribe they wanted, I'd chance it, but we wouldn't really stand much inspection close up. There's nothing they'd like more than to get their hands

on a couple of lords of the manor, not to mention what they'd do to you. There are lots of Odóns wandering around these days, and it just took Madero's murder to bring them out in the open."

"What'll we do?"

"It will be light before long, so I think we'll head down the *barranca* a ways on this level and see if we can find a place to hole up. There are lots of caves, and if we can just find one, we can even have a fire if we don't mind the smoke."

They picked their way across the slope, then struck what looked to be a deer trail that maddeningly petered out at a gully just as they spotted a promising cleft in the rocks below them, possibly a cave.

"If we can just get by this gully," Tom said, "we can get down to that cleft. Even if it isn't a cave, it'll hide us from anyone down on the bridge or up on the road either."

His mule minced on the lip of the gulley for a moment, then sprang over to the other side in a shower of small rocks. "Throw me Carlos's lead rope," Tom called. Then, "now hit him a lick on the rump!" She hit the mule as hard as she could with a rope end, causing the startled animal to leap the gully with feet to spare. If Carlos hadn't been tied down, he would surely have fallen. Then it was her turn. She chose to put her mule at the gully at a canter, thinking it would give him more momentum, but as he landed on the other side, he stumbled and went down on his knees, pitching her straight over his head. She managed to save her head by tucking it under and leading with her shoulder, but as she rolled she caught a fearful blow on the abdomen on a projecting rock. She curled up in agony, whimpering.

"Ellen! Where do you hurt?" Tom demanded, gently turning her over, but she could only shake her head from side to side. The shoulder of her blouse was in bloody tatters, but he could feel no broken bones. He felt her ribs,

then when he gently pressed below her navel, she screamed. Already he could feel the contractions under his hands.

To her, there was no time anymore, only agony upon agony. For moments at a time she would become aware of a rocky ceiling, flickering in the reflected light of the fire, only to be engulfed once again in a great hurt that shook her as a terrier shakes a rat. Someone put a rope in her hands, and when the pain was worst, she pulled against it, crying out. All the time in the background there was a comforting spate of words, meaningless but reassuring phrases of warmth and encouragement.

At last the pain mercifully subsided somewhat and she opened her eyes to find Tom bending over her, holding a cup of hot coffee in a bloody hand. He held her up while she sipped it thankfully.

"I lost the baby, didn't I?" she said in a hoarse voice. He nodded unhappily.

"Now they've taken everything from me, everything I ever had," she said stonily. "Edmundo is gone, Carlos may never be well again, my baby is gone, they even have Lupita and Luz." She closed her eyes.

He stopped wiping his hands and stroked her hair gently. "You still have Carlos," he contradicted her. "He'll get better." He paused, his expression unreadable. "And you've still got me."

She gazed into the firelit blue of his eyes in his already bearded face and for a moment she was back at Coxo again, laughingly riding a sunlit wave down the reef in a welter of foam and spray. She smiled. "I do, don't I?" She fell asleep holding his hand.

When she woke, the cave was lit by daylight streaming in from the large cleft in front. She felt empty, light as a piece of paper ready to skitter off at the first breeze. She was on her side facing Carlos, who slept on his back, snoring slightly. Along her back she could feel the warmth

of Tom's body against her. He had an arm thrown across her waist, his fingers hooked in the thin rope they had used to hold up Carlos's pants, and she could feel his warm breath on her neck. It seemed to her now that all their lives they had been fleeing. Oddly, in her dreams it wasn't Edmundo who haunted her, but the horseman with the huge black *sombrero*, a cigar clamped in his grinning teeth, prodding Carlos carelessly with his rifle.

The *hacienda* world may still have been somewhat foreign to her, but it was the only world she had, and it was a world based firmly on the idea that the *hacendado* was all-powerful, that any challenge, no matter how slight, would be met with immediate and forceful retribution. Not even a natural disaster of the dimensions of a great earthquake could have shaken her every belief and assumption as much as to see the master of her world changed from a sleek, arrogant overlord into this bewildered unshaven beggar with vacant eyes. She sighed, then winced as she realized how sore her shoulder was. Tom stirred, unhooked his fingers, and stiffly lifted his arm. He sat up and passed a hand over his face.

"I'll bet I'm ugly enough now to scare small children," he observed, and got slowly to his feet. At the mouth of the cave he called back, "It's late afternoon already, let's have some coffee."

His brash assumption that she was well enough already to take over the cooking again first annoyed her, but then she realized he was trying to keep her busy, and was thankful. Though fearfully sore, she found she could stand without help. She removed the pot of beans from the cold fire, fished one out with her fingers, and bit into it. At least something had gone right: they had cooked through before the fire had gone out. She noted with approval that he had even put a piece of *ancho* chile in with them for flavor. Carefully she built a little pyramid of small sticks, lit it with a match, and one by one added

large sticks that Tom had apparently brought in the night before. She balanced the coffeepot on three flat rocks and sat back to wait for it to boil.

"I'm going to run that blockade at the bridge on foot," Tom said, squatting down beside her. "Once I'm in Guadalajara, I can get help from Margarita and Martin to bring you and Carlos in."

Ellen was combing out her hair while waiting for the coffee. "When we're there, then what will you do?"

"I suppose get some men together and see if we can save the *hacienda*. The livestock are gone, but something can be salvaged."

"And if Carlos gets no better?"

He looked at her, his blue eyes seeming almost to glow in the dimming light. "That's up to you, isn't it? Would you be going back to California?"

"I don't know. I've written Papa a number of times, but he's never answered. He disapproved violently of my marrying Carlos, you know. He referred to him as 'that greaser.'" She smiled. "A less fitting epithet for him in those days would have been hard to find."

Tom laughed. "It's easy to forget how insular Americans are."

"Tom?"

"Hmm."

"What did you mean that day in the tackroom when you accused Carlos of being afraid another Frenchman would cut him out? I knew you were referring to a woman, but..."

"I'd hoped you wouldn't ask that."

"Well, I have. It was about Carlos's former mistress, wasn't it?"

"You knew?"

"Funny, it doesn't seem very important now. How could I not know there was somebody when he was staying out of my bed but was so wild to go to Guadalajara?"

"Ellen, from your point of view marrying a Mexican was something like marrying a Martian. Our national cult and pastime is masculinity. A man may be reluctant to bed down his pregnant wife—who knows what old wives' tales he'd been filled with—but if he doesn't practice his masculinity, he's terrified he'll lose it. Going without sex is a very unmasculine thing to do."

"But to the point of deserting Santa Cruz and me and our unborn child? That doesn't sound very masculine to me."

Tom shook his head. "I'm not sure I can explain it to you. For two years he stuck to one woman who was a paradox. Part of the time you acted like a mistress and part of the time a wife. Women just don't do that here. You set up an all but intolerable conflict in his mind. On the one hand, he enjoyed it thoroughly when you acted the part of mistress, and on the other he felt guilty and ashamed because you were his wife and he shouldn't enjoy it. You follow me so far?"

"I think so."

"When you got pregnant, it was a relief to be able to go off and do what any red-blooded Mexican male does in the circumstances, find himself a bad woman he can really enjoy himself with. Sex and violence are our national curses: they are both misused and both misunderstood."

"How do you know all this about Carlos and me? Did he talk to you? What did he say?"

Tom smiled. "Carlos talk about you? Never. But I've known enough American girls, and God knows I'm half-Mexican myself. It didn't take a clairvoyant to see what was happening. For Carlos to go to Guadalajara once more was like an addict returning to opium. The grip that uninhibited sex on the part of an experienced woman can have on the human male is unbelievable."

"I wasn't experienced, but I tried to be uninhibited," she said in a small voice. "I guess I wasn't any good at it

because the next day he would always be angry."

Tom took her hand. "You must have been very good at it if he waited until the next day. There was no way he could ever reconcile his wife doing anything but lying down docilely and accepting what came, you'll have to face that."

"He knew what I was like before I married him, why would he have run off with me?"

"Ah, but that was in the United States, where things are different."

"Tom, why do there have to be all these conventions? Why can't people act the way they feel and stop worrying about all of this 'should be' and 'ought to be' nonsense? If I feel like making love, why can't I just do it without being judged as this or that? Sometimes I almost wish I were a man!"

He grinned. "I for one am very glad you're not." He got up. "Let's have some beans and then I've got to get started. With any luck, on the other side of the bridge I can steal a horse."

When he was gone, the cave seemed dark and empty. She fed Carlos and tried to talk to him, but as usual, when he would talk at all, he was in another time and place. "Tell Edmundo to meet me at the crossroads," he'd say, looking her right in the eye, or, "Tomás, you can drink any man except me right under the table. Come on, let's go to Chuy's." She couldn't help thinking of Edmundo when he had had typhus, but Carlos's memories, thank heavens, were gentler ones. She prayed, though, that he wouldn't return to the scene of any of his amorous triumphs. She might be reconciled to his lack of faithfulness, but she didn't think she could stand to hear his affairs with other women documented.

The night was long with no one to talk to, and several times she dozed. A merciful distance seemed to have come between her and all that had happened. Now she knew

how people stood the unbearable. Gradually, however, the doubts began to invade her mind. What if Tom had been seized at the bridge and shot? How long should she wait before trying to do anything? Until their food and water gave out? Longer? Where would they go if they did leave? Was she strong enough to hoist Carlos on the mule? With a sense of panic she realized she didn't even know where the mules were.

The next day crawled by, punctuated only by Carlos looking at her and seeming to recognize her even if not their circumstances.

"Elena, *querida*," he said with his old certainty, "it's time to get dressed before our guests arrive. Wear the blue-green silk—it suits you."

As she lay with Carlos in her arms like a small child, she was glad enough of the rest, for she found she tired easily, and besides her torn and bruised shoulder there was a livid purple, blue, and green bruise clear across her abdomen where she had been thrown across the ridge of rock. The heavy bleeding didn't frighten her since she knew it was normal after childbirth, but with little water she was hard put to it to find the cloth to absorb it. She had to lead Carlos out around the back of the cleft each time to relieve his bodily needs, nor could she leave him to his own devices once there for fear he would wander off. It was this more than anything that brought home to her the seriousness of his injury. To see the normally fastidious, elegant Carlos squatting there like any peon all unconcerned in his dirty white peasant clothes wrung her heart.

Night again. She made flour *tortillas* in the iron skillet to go with the everlasting beans, and was jubilant when Carlos accepted his plate and began to eat without having to be fed. She remembered the child at Las Cruces who had fallen out of the tree. He seemed perfectly all right afterward except that he could no longer speak. The boy had never talked again, but maybe with Carlos it would be

different and he would get steadily better. Look, already he can eat by himself, she thought. God knew this cave was the nearest thing to Tom's dark and quiet stall for a horse. Tomorrow or the next day at the latest they would have him in a hospital where he could perhaps be cured.

It must have been near daylight when she heard the distant whinny of a horse. Surprisingly near below and to the right she heard an answering whicker. They were discovered—discovered and surrounded! That it should all end so easily, she thought wearily, and yet not so easily either, as she took the pistol Tom had left her. Rather than end like Leti, she determined she would make them kill her. First she herself would kill Carlos. She heard a scraping of feet on the slope outside the cleft, and she thumbed back the hammer on the gun with a loud click.

"Ellen, it's Tom, I'm back."

She uncocked the hammer and let the gun fall to her side. She noticed her hands were shaking. When he came into the firelight, she saw a dashing bandit rather than the unshaven peon who had left them. He had retained the crossed belts and sombrero, but now he wore pants and jacket of whipcord, boots, a white shirt and maroon neckerchief. He was clean shaven except for the beginnings of what promised to be a magnificent mustache. She felt oddly shy. This man had seen her as Carlos never had: sweaty, dirty, bloody, and shrieking her head off.

He grinned. "The aide to a general can't very well dress in peon's pajamas."

"Tom, don't joke. When your horse whinnied, I heard an answer below and to the right of us. We may have been discovered."

His grin remained, and he seemed vastly pleased with himself. "That was our mules. And it wasn't my horse that whinnied, it was Juanita's horse." At her look of sheer incomprehension, he went on, "I've got to say this fast because I've got to get them under cover fast."

Guadalajara's a mess. Margarita and Martín are gone, on their way to France, which Carlos might have told us except that he needed Martín as an excuse to come into town. What he didn't know, however, is that Martín cleaned out the bank of cash before he went, and right now anyone even vaguely related to Martín is very likely to be shot on sight. These *Tapatíos* don't take money matters lightly. We could probably slip Carlos into a hospital all right, but the minute he started talking, which he inevitably would, they would know he was no peon.

"The trouble with a private house is that Martín included the money of his friends in the funds he made off with. Carlos has friends of his own all right, but which of them would be on his side and which simply mad at Martín, there is no way of telling. What it amounts to is that Guadalajara simply isn't safe for him right now. Nor for you, either. It's open season on *gringos* because a lot of people blame the United States for setting up Madero for the assassination, and with that bastard Wilson as ambassador, I wouldn't be surprised if they were right."

"But where does the general come in, and who is Juanita? What are we going to do with Carlos?" Ellen was floundering in the ruins of all the plans she had made that centered around Guadalajara.

"I went to Juanita for help finally because she was the only one I could trust not to turn Carlos in. She is the one who had a brief fling with a young French diplomat." Louis! Ellen thought. "It seems that Juanita's present permanent *patron* is General Fausto Aureliano Contreras Aguilar, head of the garrison of *federales* for western Guadalajara. He was a Diaz man who managed to stay in favor when Madero came in. He would probably still be all right, but Huerta hates his guts over something that happened when they were captains together years ago. He had visions of being locked up or shot, which Huerta could very easily do to him since like many others he's

been pocketing for years the payroll for a whole paper regiment that never existed. He wants to go to the United States to spend his ill-gotten gains and wait out the revolution in comfort. Juanita would drop him for someone else who's in favor, but she's afraid they might shoot her when they shoot him because she has certainly profited by his corruption."

"They sound like nothing more than petty thieves. Why are we taking them with us? I assume that's why you brought them here."

"Not so petty—the thievery, that is." Tom picked up a burning stick and lit a cigar. "Anyway, without them we have two choices, neither of them good. We can go east along the *barranca* until the cliffs give out, then strike southwest until we cut the road to Manzanillo, but that could take us fifty miles out of our way. I don't even know how far we'd have to go before we could find a place to cross the *barranca* where the mules could make it. We could also go west and try the same thing, only we'd be going even farther out of our way because we'd have to ride clear around Lake Chapala and then strike south. The lake itself is sixty to seventy miles long."

"So what do you propose?"

"Going back over the bridge we just crossed below us and circling Guadalajara."

"How are we going to cross the bridge?"

"The men holding the bridge right now are militia, supposedly under the control of the military. Fausto says he can get us all through, and once we clear Guadalajara, our way to Manzanillo will be open."

"Why are we going to Manzanillo? I'm not sure I even know where it is."

"Manzanillo is an old port on the Pacific. We'll get you a boat there for the United States. There are no reports of bandit activity around there, though that doesn't mean there isn't any."

"Wouldn't it be simpler to sneak into Guadalajara and get on a train for the States?"

"The favorite sport of every two-bit bandit is to dynamite trains. I wonder there are any left. With Madero's death, men like Villa will rise again and cut off the rail lines just as they did before. Remember Edmundo talking about Orozco? Well, he liked to blow up one end of a tunnel, let the train get into the tunnel, and then blow up the other end. Though he's finished now, I'm sure he has imitators. The whole country is up in arms, and any overland train trip to the north would be asking for a not-so-quick, not-so-painless death."

Ellen looked at Carlos, who was sitting hugging his knees and rocking slowly back and forth, his eyes vacant and dreaming. "Are you sure it wouldn't be better to take him to a hospital here? They needn't find out who he is."

"I talked to two of the same doctors I went to about Edmundo. They say that in the case of head injuries they can make no promises whatever of a cure. If it's a blood clot and localized swelling of the brain, sometimes it will cure itself and sometimes they can operate. But if there is actual damage to the brain, no operation will help. One of them even said that from what I told him of the symptoms and the nature of the blows, his opinion was probably brain damage. The other said he wouldn't venture an opinion until he could examine the injury. If an operation will help, there are probably better doctors in the United States."

"But can he stand the trip?"

Tom shook his head. "No one can tell us that. However, I don't see that we have much choice. I'm sorry not to give you more time to get used to the idea, but we've got to clear that bridge down there before daylight when the guard will change. The present militia are *maderistas* who have honored the general's safe conduct signed by Madero himself, but they expect to vacate the bridge in favor

of the *federales* any time now. If Huerta hasn't lost his mind, he'll already have sent out lists of enemies of the government to be picked up, and our fat friend will surely be included."

"All right," she said finally, and began to pack up the food.

"Cheer up," he said as he left, "the general says he has friends who live on the outskirts of the city who can put us up until dark tonight. You can have a bath and wash your clothes."

A bath! The idea of a bath made tears run scalding down her face. She rolled up and tied the bedrolls with the blankets inside and packed everything else into the saddlebags. She wiped Carlos's face and hands and felt sorry that his mistress should see him like this, let alone the general. She had an odd sense of guilt, as if it were somehow all her fault, as if something she had done had led them to this sorry pass. Then the sound of sliding feet and rattling stones erased all but the imminent meeting from her mind, a meeting that ran contrary to everything she had expected.

First to enter was a small woman with black hair and enormous black eyes. Ellen had expected a young dark beauty like the senator's wife who sat next to Carlos at Margarita's, but this woman was at least in her middle thirties and had a pleasantly ugly, very animated face whose sheer vitality made one soon forget that she was in no way beautiful. She burst into the cave and threw her arms around a startled Ellen.

"My dear," she began in a low, hoarse, but oddly musical voice, "what you have gone through and how brave you've been! Never mind, Juanita's here now and all will be well, you'll see. What a dreadful trip out we've had, looking for bandits at every turn! You're a handsome wench, I can see that even now—trust old Carlos to get himself the best. I can't for the life of me see why he was

creeping around Guadalajara lately, and with that impossible Gomez woman at that, but men are funny about pregnancy. Jealous, that's what I'd call it; they can't have any children themselves and they never get over it. They think themselves so superior, and they can't even bear a child . . ."

She went on with a stream of steady fast chatter, all the while picking up odds and ends, getting Carlos to his feet, and loading Tom down with saddlebags and bedrolls. Before Ellen knew it, they were climbing down a faint trail to where the mules were tethered to a long rope stretched between two rocks, in reach of a small spring. They had eaten and trampled whatever grass there was into bare earth, however. When they were all mounted, Tom took Juanita up in front of him on the saddle, lifting her effortlessly as if she were a small child. He smacked her bottom playfully as he swung her up, and Ellen saw with a pang that he was very fond of her as he gave one of his rare laughs. He had no doubt enjoyed her favors, too.

The steep climb soon settled the mules down, and before long they had passed the cave and were nearing the road. The first they knew anyone was there was when they heard the snick of a rifle bolt and stopped dead.

"For God's sake, Fausto, it's just us," Tom said impatiently.

Out from behind a tree rode one of the fattest men Ellen had ever seen. Even in the dim predawn light she could see enough of him to marvel that he hadn't squashed a woman as small as Juanita.

"I didn't know," the general said defensively. "There could have been an ambush set up in the cave to trap you."

"Paranoid, that's what he is, just plain paranoid," Juanita announced. "If he weren't like a great big teddy-bear to sleep with, I wouldn't have anything to do with him. You know, he actually takes a gun to bed with him at night! I keep telling him that he's going to end up shooting

one of us in a very delicate place, but he won't listen." She laughed. "The first time I told him that, you know what he did? He looked scared and clutched his stomach."

The light was too dim for Ellen to be sure she could discern his expression, but it looked improbably as if he were beaming. Tom meanwhile had lifted Juanita onto her horse. He led the way down the steep switchback road, then came the general, Juanita, Carlos, and Ellen bringing up the rear. As they neared the bridge, they halted and the general rode forward. There was quite a conversation, the clink of coins changing hands, and then they all rode across the bridge.

"Wait a minute!" the sentry at the far end said. "There are two extra people here."

"Oh, come on, man," the general said offhandedly, "these are my servants. I lent them to a *hacendade* up the road for a fiesta. The place was attacked by Negrito's band and they've been hiding out ever since. This man," indicating Tom, "is a foreman on the ranch, he'll vouch for them. He came to tell me where they were waiting."

The story was full of holes, but the general pronounced it with such conviction that the sentry fell back. Before he could change his mind, the odd troop passed by at a trot and were lost to sight around the first bend on the steep upward climb toward the plateau on which sat Guadalajara. The road snaked in long flat loops right up the steep rock slabs that rose vertically for hundreds of feet to the edge of the *barranca*. This side of the huge canyon was almost always in shade, and between slabs of bare rock there grew a profusion of giant ferns, dark green brush, and birch-like trees. Far below them they could see the Santiago River, and as they climbed, the first rays of the rising sun struck the grassy hillsides opposite. It was as if God had taken an axe and cleft a mighty wedge between the sunlight and the shade, between the open golden grassy slopes on one side and the dark, mysterious, fern-

grown battlements of the other, where eventually they could see briefly the long white plume of an enormous waterfall that dropped for a quarter of a mile or more to shatter itself on the black rocks above the sullen river.

As they breasted the last climb, the brilliant rays of the early sun struck their faces, blinding them. Despite the several streams that fed into the waterfall, the top of the plateau near the rim was only sparsely grassed, with humps of sun-blistered rock like bones showing through the short stingy growth. As they rode inland, these islands of infertility became fewer, interspersed now with longer grass, mesquite trees, and even pines.

"It won't be long now," the general said with a grateful sigh. "San Isidro is just up that side road there. We'll be staying in the old ranch house that isn't used anymore except when they have large numbers of guests. The main house is several miles farther on. I know you'll excuse our hosts, who ah, prefer to remain separate from this venture. Can't say I blame them; I doubt I'd have done even this much for them," he admitted honestly, pulling out a large patterned handkerchief and mopping his face.

Ellen was so tired she wondered if she could go much farther without falling off her mule. She ached all over as if she'd been beaten, and she didn't dare even think of a hot bath for fear she might be disappointed, in which case she knew that she would throw aside all pride and break down sobbing. So that's what happens, one part of her mind observed. You see enough horrors and you can't weep for people you love anymore, only for bodily comforts. She looked at Tom, who was chattering away to Juanita. He had become a well dressed stranger. He had become intimately than her husband was suddenly a being as alien as Negrito. Since the cave, he had offered her no word, not even a look. She found she was almost too tired to care.

The house was a long, low, old-style weathered adobe

with tall, narrow, wooden-shuttered windows. The rooms opening onto the central patio were small and bare, and equipped with pitchers, basins, and chamber pots which led her to believe that running water existed only in an outdoor pump. The general's friends had thoughtfully provided several maids, a cook, and two men, all Hui-chole Indians who spoke little Spanish. When a maid led her to a room with a large copper tub and proceeded to pour boiling water in it, however, Ellen wouldn't have cared if she had spoken only Swahili. The maid then poured cold water until Ellen, testing the water with her fingers, told her to stop. The girl pointed to a large towel and a piece of perfumed soap and smiled, then left. Ellen actually groaned as she lowered herself into water as hot as she could stand. Her shoulder stung for a moment, then succumbed to the blessed heat as well.

An hour later, her hair still damp and hanging down her back, she came out in the one wrinkled skirt and shirtwaist she had brought with her. She winced as she thought of the women of Negrito's band preening themselves in her green velvet or the blue-green silk Carlos loved so. Well, she thought philosophically, better than being raped. Let them enjoy the clothes to their hearts' content. She sat in the early afternoon sun in the patio with its *guayava* trees until her hair was dry, then returned to her room, got into bed, and fell into a deep sleep.

When she woke, dark was falling, and she felt as if she never wanted to move again. She made herself get up and wash her face and get dressed again, for she could hear voices in the patio. She braided her hair into a single long plait that hung down her back and went out into the gathering dusk. Tom and the general were bending over a map, and the general was saying, "If you strike off down this stream bed, it will cut the Colima road, and from there on it will all be easy."

"Look, general, let's get something straight," Tôm

said. "It won't any of it be easy. To begin with, you are an asset only as long as Huerta's blacklist doesn't arrive. From then on, you're a liability. The first *federales* who catch you will put you up against the nearest wall and shoot you. There are bound to be a lot of free spirits like Zapata in the south roaming the road as well, men who turned against Madero when his land promises fell through, and for them your safe conduct wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel. Then there are the out-and-out bandits who always take every civil upset as an excuse to murder and plunder anyone they can catch, the Negritos of this world. What it amounts to is that every man's hand will be against us. I am slowly getting around to telling you that we can't use the Colima road. We'll have to parallel it, and the going will be hard. I'm afraid that our mules will hold up better than your horses."

"In our favor, my boy," the general replied, chewing happily on his cigar, "is the fact that I have all but unlimited funds. I was clever enough to keep them in very liquid gold pieces, and there is another stash waiting in Colima for my arrival, with the largest and final one stored safely in Manzanillo. In Mexico I have never yet found a situation that you couldn't buy your way out of."

"You were foresighted, weren't you?" Tom asked almost admiringly. "However, about the first gold piece you start flashing around, we'll all be drawn and quartered to find out where the others are."

"Trust me, Tomás, trust me. Believe me, this is one area where I know what I'm doing." He turned and saw Ellen. "Ah, here is the fair Elena. My dear," he said bending over her hand, "allow me to congratulate you on the positive transformation you have effected. I never thought anyone would trap the elusive Carlos, but now I can see why he went willingly into such sweet captivity."

"My stars, but you're a flatterer, general," she said with a twinkle in her eye. "I begin to see how Juanita is so taken

with you. If it weren't for my being married already, I'd just be tempted to give her a run for her money."

The general's little eyes widened momentarily, and then he and Tom simultaneously broke into a guffaw. "If that's what a bath does for you, Ellen," Tom said, still laughing, "I'm going to keep you away from water."

When they sat down later to a spicy venison stew cooked with wine, Ellen thought she had never tasted anything so good. Juanita entertained them with anecdotes from her days as a professional dancer, but from time to time she glanced, almost against her will it seemed, at Carlos, who was bathed and shaved and looking his old self except for his complete lack of animation. Juanita obviously couldn't get it through her head that he might never again be the charming, debonair man she had once held in her arms and who knows, even loved. Ellen took comfort that he was still eating by himself, and after listening to Juanita for a while, Tom and the general immersed themselves once more in the itinerary of the trip. They all ate well, however; they were well aware that this might be the last really good meal they would have for some time.

Tom decided to ride the horse he'd bought as long as he could and use the extra mule as a pack animal. In addition to the saddlebags they all had, the pack mule carried extra food, tools, ammunition, bedding, and cookware. It must have been close to ten o'clock that night before they were all packed and mounted. As they clattered out of the yard, they saw the Indian servants standing on the front steps regarding them impassively. Ellen waved on an impulse, but there was no answering change of expression. She shivered, then looked to her mount as they left the friendly lights and rode into the enveloping darkness on the first stage of their long journey.

9

At the top of the hill overlooking the upper part of the Sayula Valley and Lake Atotonilco, they drew rein. The general shifted uncomfortably on his saddle, and Ellen wagered to herself that he hadn't had a hard two days' riding for years. It was just as well he had a large horse, a big rawboned brute with a roman nose and a mouth like flint—but he could go all day and all night too if necessary. Next to the mules, he was the strongest animal there. Juanita's horse was an easy-gaited sorrel mare sadly out of condition who might or might not last long enough to harden down despite the lightness of her rider. Right now her head was hanging and the sweat streamed off her. The horse Tom rode was a tall, nervous black that threw his head, the kind of horse that always had white lather marks where the reins touched his neck and between his hind legs. Ellen would be willing to put money on his not lasting if they had to push.

Tom had the map out, and he pointed down to a dirt road that took off from the Morelia highway they were

on. "That must be the road to Zacatlán, and from there we'll pick up the one that goes on to Tocoalco and Sayula." He indicated the telegraph wires that went on past the crossroads on their way to Jocotepec, Jiquilpan, and Morelia. "I'm just as happy to turn off here. I wouldn't be surprised if they were humming right now with the general's name, among others."

"Tomás, what's that?" Juanita pointed down the route they were going to take. The late afternoon sun struck on a distant gaggle of what looked like colored wagons, people, and horses.

"My God, it looks like a carnival or something, out here in the middle of nowhere. General, give me a look through your field glasses."

The general already had them glued to his eyes. "It's not a carnival, it's a circus!" the fat man exclaimed.

Tom fingered his sprouting mustache and got a far-away look in his eye.

"I know what you're thinking, and I don't like the idea," Ellen said. "Even if they don't object to our traveling with them, we'll take three times as long to reach wherever they're going as we would by ourselves."

"Maybe so," Tom replied, still rubbing his upper lip thoughtfully, "but look at it this way. If we keep on alone, Juanita's horse will surely give out, and perhaps mine, too. That puts two of us on a mule that already has a lot to carry, all of which will have to be given to the other animals. Not only that, but one or more of the larger towns we go through is bound to have an army garrison, which means they'll have telegraph, and the general here is hard to miss."

"He got us through the blockade on this side of Guadalajara," Ellen pointed out, "so they can't be looking for him yet. Maybe they never will."

"Oh yes, they will. We're a pretty strange group, and it won't be hard to trace us. I'd be willing to give up the

speed and at the same time give the horses a break by getting in with those circus people and in effect disappearing on the Morelia highway. There's no such thing as a strange group in a circus."

As they came up on the wagons, they saw that one had a wheel off and was propped up on blocks. "Need help?" Tom asked of a tall pale young man with gold wire-rimmed spectacles who seemed to be giving orders.

"Thank you—no, at least not for the wheel. I wish you were a magician and could fix our lion, though. Poor old César is dying and there doesn't seem to be anything we can do."

"A lion!" Tom exclaimed. "An African lion? Here?"

"Three years ago a European circus came to Mexico City," the young man explained, "and they brought César among others with them. I saw every performance of that circus, and when César got sick and they decided to leave him behind, I bought him for very little. It turned out all he had was altitude sickness. As long as I don't go over two thousand meters, he's all right. But now he's got something different. He won't eat, and you can see him dying right in front of your eyes. The old elephant we bought from the man who was going to start a zoo got pneumonia and died in Tepic, and if César goes, we won't have enough circus left to make it worthwhile."

"Let me look at him," Tom said. "My veterinary course didn't cover lions, but maybe I can suggest something."

"Would you?" The young man brightened and went on as he led the way to a wagon with bars, "He's almost human, and to tell you the truth, watching him die is like watching my child die."

Inside the wagon on some straw was the sorriest looking lion Ellen had ever seen. His fur looked motheaten and dull, his mane was ragged, and his yellow eyes lustreless. He exuded a strong sour smell. The pale young man didn't hesitate, but opened the cage and got in with him,

taking the lion's shaggy head in his hands and hugging him. The lion rumbled in his throat, and a large pink tongue came out and licked the young man's face.

"I'll be damned," Tom muttered, climbing in himself. He patted the lion tentatively and touched his nose. "He's got a fever," he said. "Can you get him to open his mouth?"

The young man grasped the upper and lower jaws and by pulling indicated to the lion he wanted his mouth open. The lion obediently opened, giving off a fetid breath that Ellen could smell as far away as she was. Her mule backed nervously and nearly pulled away from her. Tom poked around briefly and then gave the lion a pat.

"You're lucky," he said. "That lion's got about the only thing wrong with him that I probably could have diagnosed. "He's got two badly abscessed teeth."

"Teeth!" the young man said unbelievably. "They wouldn't make him this sick, would they?"

"Of course they would. Grazing animals don't usually have problems like that with their teeth, but an infected, abscessed gum from a foxtail, for example, can eventually kill even a horse. The abscess poisons the whole system unless it drains of itself. In the case of César, he wasn't able to eat, besides."

"So now what do we do?"

Tom shrugged. "They'll have to come out, but I'm damned if I know how."

"You mean pull them?"

"That's exactly what I mean. If he were a man, you'd get him drunk if you didn't have anything else, but I can't tell you how you go about getting a lion drunk."

The circus folk had meanwhile crowded around. "He likes milk when he can get it, Demetrio—why don't you try putting cane alcohol in it?" a dwarf asked.

The wagon wheel by this time having been replaced, the little caravan made its way into Zacatlán a few miles

farther on. Demetrio and Alonzo, the juggler, came staggering in from town holding a large milk can by the handles. They poured a good bit of it in a bucket, and Demetrio upended a bottle of alcohol. By this time there was a sizeable audience, made up in large part of yelling, shoving, ragged children.

César smelled the milk suspiciously and wrinkled his nose, but hunger got the better of him and he began to lap. Before long the bucket was empty, but he seemed to show no effects whatsoever. He sat down and began to lick a paw. Ellen suddenly noticed that his tongue was going slower and slower. He gave a prodigious yawn then, and slowly sank down on the straw. His breathing turned to a snore.

"Quick, man!" Tom said urgently. He took up the large pair of pliers Demetrio handed him, and the two of them entered the cage. Demetrio had to hold the lion's jaws open, but the snoring never hesitated. By this time the crowd was glued to the bars of the cage. Tom put the pliers on one tooth, and gave a yank, almost falling over backward when the tooth came right away, followed by a spurt of bloody pus. The second tooth came as easily, and Tom doused the holes with some of the contents of another bottle, this one of mescal, finishing by upending the bottle in his own mouth and handing it to Demetrio, who took a long swig himself. The audience cheered. Then Tom took one of the teeth, yellow ugly-looking things, and gave it to a small boy peering through the bars. The other, with a bow, he presented to Ellen, who took it gingerly between forefinger and thumb, but curtsied deeply. The crowd cheered again. César slept on blissfully, his snores lost in the chatter and laughing that followed one of his most successful performances.

As far as Demetrio was concerned, nothing was too good for them. He wanted to give Tom his own bed, but Tom declined. "Well," Demetrio said scratching his head,

"suppose we take the tents and all that stuff out of the baggage wagons, and you can sleep in there. We'd have to take it out tomorrow morning anyway."

Ellen for one was grateful to sleep up off the ground; she kept thinking about a scorpion crawling in to keep her company. They divided up, with the three men in one wagon and the two women in the other. Then Demetrio and the general and Tom and Alonzo the juggler settled down to some serious drinking.

That evening they camped in a field near town, and they all ate together at a trestle table made up of boards on sawhorses. The general contributed a calf he bought from a delighted local farmer, bull calves being a glut on the market. They dug a pit, set up a spit, and with much merriment proceeded to roast the calf whole. *Tortillas*, beans, and *nopalitos*—strips of green cactus—cooked with tomato and chile completed their banquet. As Ellen toasted the *tortillas* briefly right on the coals and wrapped them in a warm cloth, she tried to get straight the company she was in.

There was Demetrio, of course, and Alonzo the juggler who was also the magician; Alonzo's buxom wife Anita, who served as cook and bareback rider and the lady who got sawed in half; the trapeze team: Emilio, Francisco, and Marlina, all three stocky, golden-skinned youths, shy as deer, who might have been brothers and sister, so alike were they; Raul, a heavyset, black-browed bear of a man with slow wits but an enormous amount of patience for training animals. He had trained the dogs, the trick burro, and the team of goats that drew the cart with Doroteo, the dwarf, to begin his clown act with Gregorio, a large man well over six feet with a small head. Gregorio's plump little wife Rosa helped with the juggling act, the magic act, and the cooking. They had tried to teach her bareback riding, but she was terrified of the horses, two placid piebald mares with feathers on their hocks and broad

backs. All the men doubled as laborers when it came time to put up or strike the tents. The circus people were scattered out among four wagons, with two more for the tents, props, and baggage.

There was a great deal of teasing and loud laughter around the table, everyone in good spirits because of the unexpected banquet. The general kept rising the proposing toasts, and even Ellen got a little tipsy. Juanita was flirting outrageously with Tom, putting Ellen in mind of Carlos and Gloria the day of the beach picnic. Gloria wouldn't be flirting with him now, she thought. For everyone, tomorrow was a time of uncertainty, possibly of danger. The circus was limping along on its last legs, the civil unrest circumscribing their movements until the modest living they used to make had dwindled to bare subsistence. Demetrio explained that they hoped to keep going as far as Manzanillo, where there would be work since it was a port town.

"I should have thought you'd have been better off in Guadalajara," Tom said.

"There was a small matter there of bills due on food for the animals. When we got to Guadalajara, news of Madero's assassination had just arrived, and circuses were the last thing on anyone's mind—we were playing to audiences of fifteen and twenty people. There were shootings in the streets at night; no one felt safe, and so we left. We went through Chapala and Jocotepec, where we did a little better, and then we came here." He sighed. "The circus has been my life, and now it is soon to be finished, maybe for good, but at least until this misbegotten revolution is over. They said when Madero came in that the revolution was over, but now it is worse."

"Haven't the bandits and revolutionaries ever bothered you?" Tom asked, curious. "I'd have thought that the idea of tormenting a lion or stealing your horses would have been irresistible to thieves like the ones who drove us from our *hacienda*."

Demetrio shrugged. "Who knows what is in their minds? We have tried to stay out of the worst areas, like Zapata territory, but for some reason where we've gone we seem to be accepted as a harmless part of the landscape. We're obviously not rich enough to have money with us, and except perhaps for the piebald horses that are too heavy to be really good for riding, there's hardly anything worth stealing. Besides, they are very superstitious about oddly-made people like Doroteo, and I think they may feel it is bad luck to molest us."

For now, however, Demetrio had forgotten his troubles. One hand held a veal rib and the other was draped fondly around the shoulders of the general, who was shoveling into his mouth meat, beans, *nopalitos*, and *tortillas* as fast as he could swallow, as if afraid it might all disappear. He and Demetrio both had a sheen of grease on their faces, and the mescal bottle they shared was slippery with veal fat where they had passed it back and forth.

Ellen coaxed Carlos to eat, putting the choicest pieces she could find on his plate. It was as if, she thought, he was walking in his sleep. They could give him something to do, and he would do it as long as someone kept him at it, but the minute he was left alone he would stop and stare vacantly into space, like a toy that had run down. Sometimes he seemed to know her, but never did he recognize their present circumstances. They had let his mustache grow and put him back in the white peasant clothes.

"He'll be safer that way," Tom explained. "If we're captured, they could hardly connect him with a big *hacienda* owner."

"But what happens when he opens his mouth? No peon ever spoke like that."

Tom smiled grimly. "Then we'll just have to hope he doesn't say anything, won't we?"

Exhausted, Ellen went to bed early, leaving the rest of them to their merriment. She settled Carlos down in the

men's wagon, then went to the other one and fell asleep almost immediately. She had no idea how many hours later it was that she woke. The candle she had left burning for Juanita had burned out, but she could hear drunken singing at the distant table. She went out into the starry night to relieve herself. If Tom and the general were both still up, she should check on Carlos, who would sometimes roll clear off his bedroll and lie shivering until someone covered him up. She could see the general and Demetrios and some of the others, but Tom was nowhere in sight. Probably off somewhere with Juanita, she thought resentfully. She went to the men's wagon and had her hand raised to open the door when a familiar feminine voice that sounded as if it were next to her though it was obviously inside the wagon made her freeze.

"Oh Tomás, *querido*, where did you learn that, you naughty boy? Do it again—ah *Diós mío*, that feels good."

Tom gave a low warm, sensual laugh. "How about this?" he murmured huskily, "and this? God, you've got a marvellous body..."

Ellen stumbled away and crept into her wagon. For a long time she lay awake, tears pricking her eyes. Carlos had never laughed like that when he made love to her—had he when he made love to Juanita? Carlos hadn't spoken to her then, either. At its best it was like a silent dance in which each partner knew the steps; at other times it was a casual coupling, silent as well, after which she felt used and dissatisfied. The frightening possibility that she would never again experience even this suddenly occurred to her. For better or for worse, she was still married to Carlos and the realization that he might well be with her for all the years of her life, a child to be cared for, haunted her. Would there be nothing else but seeing to it that he ate and got clothed and went to the bathroom while she watched herself slowly wither, as she had watched May Olsen wither, who had elected to nurse her invalid mother

through the years rather than marrying? She shuddered, and tired as she was, she was still awake when Juanita crept silently in.

The next morning, those who were able bolted down a hasty breakfast of *tortillas*, eggs, and beans, and the work of setting up the big tent began. Raul, Gregorio, and the general with the heavy sledge hammers pounded in the tent stakes, each of the three of them hitting one after the other in an easy rhythm. When Tom, seemingly without ill effects from the night before, twitted him about what a wonderful roustabout he made, the general laughed. "Did you think I was always a general? I was doing this when you were in your cradle, Tomás. If I do it all the way to Manzanillo, I will lose this," he went on, patting his sizeable stomach, "and then we shall see who beds down whom."

Tom looked startled for a moment, then grinned. "Why, you old fox, you're sharper than I thought possible with a gut full of mescal." He and Alonzo went back to hitch the mules to another of the big poles that would hold up the tent.

By noon, the tent was up, a weathered, much-patched expanse of ancient canvas with hundreds of holes beyond patching that let in the sun in myriad sparkles of light. The ring was set up, the trapezes rigged, and the benches for the audience in place. Everyone, even Alonzo's three-year-old daughter and Gregorio's four children, did their part in fetching and carrying. Ragged children of all ages from the town swarmed around, a few of the bigger ones earning a five centavo piece and a free pass or running errands or pulling on ropes.

"We should be ready easily by four," Demetrio said with satisfaction later when they were eating lunch, "but I wish we had a few more acts. After losing the elephant, I had hoped to find something in Guadalajara."

"Maybe we can help you out," Tom ventured. "Ellen, how well do you feel?"

"Better all the time, but what's that got to do with anything?"

"Remember the day Carlos was so angry when you won the race at the *hacienda*?"

She nodded, puzzled.

"Do you still think you could do it?"

"Pick up a stick from a running horse? I don't know, I'd have to try it, but I know I couldn't do it from a mule."

"What about Juanita's sorrel mare? She's small and gentle, and you wouldn't have to win any races."

Ellen saw what he was getting at. What would be hardly interesting when done by a man might be spectacular when done by a woman, especially one with long blonde hair. If they actually became a part of the circus, it might well be like having a safe conduct to Manzanillo. Demetrio had said that bandits didn't bother them, and the soldiers would hardly be looking for a general in a circus. He had gotten them out of Guadalajara; they couldn't abandon him now. Who knew if Carlos could have stood the kind of riding they would have had to do off the main road, let alone the horses. She nodded again. "Let me try it."

Demetrio was looking from one to the other bewildered, but Tom ignored him. "Juanita, can you still dance?" Tom asked.

"*Querido*, with you I can always dance."

"Well, this afternoon you'll get your chance to show off. Can the general do anything besides pound tent pegs?"

"Ask him." She ran her hand fondly over his bald head. "Fausto, do you have some talents I don't know about?"

"My little bird," the general replied, "the talents you are talking about they would hardly allow me to demonstrate in a circus. However, it just so happens that when I

was a lieutenant I was the best polo player and the best shot in the regiment, possibly in the whole army. Polo is out, I'm too old and fat, but I've kept up my shooting and won quite a few bets with it, too. They look at old General Contreras and think to themselves that the bragging old fool wouldn't know one end of a gun from another." He paused, his eyes twinkling. "To answer your question, Tomás, yes, I think perhaps I could qualify as another act."

After lunch they all went out on the field to practice. Juanita appeared with castanets, which she began clicking in a thoroughly professional manner. She had put on a long ruffled red skirt with many petticoats underneath it. At an imaginary chord of guitar music, she drew herself up and was transformed into an imperious Spanish lady, proud yet fiery, a far cry from the flirting girls of the Christmas village dance. Tom played the aggressive, dominating male, who nevertheless became like a shadow silhouette before the sheer drive of Juanita's personality. They challenged each other through a series of intricate steps, she like a bright flame, he a stubborn, imperious grandee, consumed despite himself to the excited beat of the hollow clicking castanets.

When it was over, there was a concerted shouted "Olé!" from the dwarf and Alonzo, who had been watching. Ellen had a suspicion that Demetrio had sent the pair to see if there were really any acts here or no. Why, she thought, had Juanita given up dancing? She must be crowding forty, and yet she could make you forget her age, what she was, everything in the excitement of that dance. She noticed that Juanita was wringing wet, though, and surmised that she was no doubt out of condition.

"Ellen?" It was Tom, holding Juanita's sorrel mare with Ellen's saddle on her.

She mounted, and watched Tom work a stick into the

ground, having to twist and turn it because of the hardness of the dry soil. She walked the mare a hundred yards away, then turned, spotting the stick. She squeezed her knees, shifted her weight forward, breaking the horse into a fast canter. As they approached the stick, she slid her foot out of the off stirrup, grasped the latigo strap, and went down and up in one swift motion. To the onlookers, it seemed as if she had overrun the stick, but then they saw her galloping on, waving it in her hand.

"Good show!" the general applauded, beaming.

"I don't think you should do it," Tom said, scowling.

"Whyever not? It was your idea. This mare's better for it than Luz, slower and steadier."

"If she shied even a little while you were down like that, she'd brain you on a tent pole."

"She won't." Ellen patted her. "Will you, pretty one?"

Meanwhile the general had set up on a stick a large board with a piece of paper fastened to it. In each hand he held one of a pair of ivory-handled six shooters. Without seeming to take much aim, he shot them simultaneously until all six shots from each gun were expended, making a seemingly random series of holes. He stopped.

"Well?" Tom asked. Juanita was smirking, Ellen noticed.

The general handed Tom a charred stick. "Connect the bullet holes with this."

Tom walked up to the paper and drew a line from hole to hole. Magically there appeared the side view of a rabbit's head. The general waved back Tom, who was now grinning, and again firing rapidly with both guns, he put in an eye and what turned out to be whiskers. His audience clapped, laughing.

"Of course, besides that, I can do the usual firing over my shoulder while looking in a mirror and shooting a *cigarillo* out of a man's mouth," the general proclaimed modestly, "but this one is a little different."

Ellen noticed Doroteo and Alonzo trotting back toward the big tent. "Looks like we may be in," Tom observed, then turned to Ellen. "Can you do that with your hair down?"

"I suppose I could, only I'd have to be sure it didn't drag on the ground or the mare will step on it and I'll be scalped."

She remounted the mare and swung down beside the horse again. "About three or four inches should come off, just to be safe."

She and Tom walked back to the tent leading the horse, and Tom borrowed a pair of scissors from Anita, Alonzo's wife. He gathered her loosened hair until it fell evenly down her back, and after a pause she heard the snip of the scissors. When he stepped back, she found him standing there staring down at the fine strands of blonde hair he held in his hand. He raised his head and she was looking into his eyes, like gazing into a warm summer sea with sunlit reflections on the blue ripples. They looked at each other for what seemed a long time, then he silently turned and walked away. She watched him until he disappeared behind the wagons.

That afternoon at five they gave their first performance. The audience, who clearly knew all about César, was friendly. The lion was eating and already obviously feeling better, but for today he was wheeled into the ring in his cage, and Demetrio contented himself with merely putting his head in the beast's mouth. César gave a comical hiccough and licked Demetrio's face. The audience laughed. Tom had borrowed a black lion tamer's suit from Demetrio that fit him so tightly he looked as if he had been poured into it. His own high boots concealed the fact that his pants didn't reach even to his ankles. He and Juanita were an immediate success, and they made her do a solo encore.

The other regular circus acts were nothing out of the

ordinary except that Alonzo devoted a section of his act to spinning ordinary wooden tops on his hands, up his arms, and along his hat brim. The children were fascinated by him, for tops were something they knew very well indeed, and here was this magician doing things with tops that simply couldn't be done. Ellen had a vision of every child in town out practicing madly for weeks to come.

The general's piece of paper turned out not to be large enough to be seen by everyone, but he made up for it by some spectacular shots over his shoulder. As for Ellen's contribution, Tom's misgiving proved all too true, not because of the audience, but because of a rope that made the mare break stride. Ellen didn't hit a tent pole, but she took a nasty fall on the hard ground of the field where the tent was pitched. Small circuses could hardly carry around much in the way of sawdust with them. Tom and Demetrio knelt over her. "Are you all right?" She nodded and slowly got up, dusted herself off, and remounted. The second time she did it perfectly, and the audience went wild. "Maybe you should do it that way every time—fall off at first to show them how hard it is, and then make it look simple," the general suggested. Though she knew he was joking, she gave him a withering look.

After the eight o'clock performance was over, they all had a succulent stew of veal, onions, and tomatoes, with all the *tortillas* they could eat, and Ellen saw to Carlos's needs and fell into bed exhausted, leaving the others still talking by the cooking fire. An hour later, however, she was still awake, aching all over from the fall. A gentle knock came, and a whispered voice told her to come to the door. She poked her head out and was surprised to find Tom, who she supposed would be revelling in Juanita's charms again. Her surprise must have showed because he grinned.

"Tonight's the general's turn. Here, I've got a circus cloak for you and a horse. Hurry up, and don't make any noise."

Bewildered, she started to protest, thought better of it because of the noise it would make, and on an impulse slipped out in her nightgown and sandals. He wrapped her in a cloak and they crept on beyond the wagons to where two saddled horses were waiting. They cantered off, going through the silent town and out the other side. A quarter moon was giving off a brilliant light, and before long Tom said, "There it is!"

She looked where he was pointing, and there below the road lay a large pool, partially obscured by trees. They took a trail off the road and wound down under the trees, the shadows throwing black and silver patterns across their way. Ellen became aware of a strong sulphur smell. They tethered the horses and Tom disappeared for a few minutes then walked toward the pool, clad only from the waist down in the clinging pants of his long underwear. Dear heaven, she thought, he's going swimming, and had a pang of regret that she had only her nightgown and so couldn't swim with him.

"Come on," he called. "This is just what you need. You can swim in your nightgown if you want, the Mexican women all bathe in their shifts."

Still struck by the unreality of the whole adventure, she took off the cloak and did a running dive into the water, ending with a bellyflop as the nightgown tripped her. She nearly groaned with ecstasy, for the water was hot, and she could feel all her aches dissolving in the sulphurous heat of that natural hot spring.

"How did you know about it?"

"Some of the townspeople told me, and I got them to give me directions." He looked different with his wet hair plastered in bangs across his forehead, younger, wilder. "I know you hit pretty hard when you went off that horse, so I figured you could use a hot bath. That was some flop you took to get in, though." He laughed, his teeth gleaming in the moonlight. "I had this vision of you easing yourself into the water and sedately soaking, like those

arthritic old ladies you see at spas."

They splashed about like children, laughing for no reason, swimming under water. Tom climbed a tree overhanging the pool and dived off into the water, grabbing her ankles and upending her. She splashed him and raced off across the pool, he in close pursuit. She started to climb out, and he pulled her back with a splash. She turned and came up next to him, planning to duck him. Instead, they were standing face to face much closer than they had been earlier when he held the pieces of hair in his hand.

The moonlight outlined his wet shoulders in cold light that lay across the top of his head, leaving his face in dimness. Those large clever hands, warm, knowing, took hold of her arms, and she trembled under their touch. Then surprisingly he gently brushed a tendril of wet hair back from her face and let his arms drop. She spoke first.

"What's the matter?" she asked bitterly. "Is it because I'm not Juanita?"

"Yes, Ellen, that's exactly what it is," he answered calmly, his face still unreadable. "You'd be doing this for all the wrong reasons, and afterward you'd hate me and yourself too."

"What's wrong with me?" she whispered, agonized. "My husband lies badly hurt and I go off to play in the water with his best friend and yes, want him to make love to me as well. Your women here go all their lives, many of them, without wanting a man to make love to them, I've heard them talk. What kind of unnatural creature am I?"

"Ellen, did you ever read of the customs of the Chinese, who bind their highborn women's feet from the time they are babies until the feet are so stunted and deformed that they can hardly walk on them? That is what we do to women's minds here. Women are meant to be compliant possessions, not living breathing human beings with wants and desires, and so all that warmth and fire we

might enjoy we kill because we're terrified of it. There are some brave souls like Juanita who have broken the bars of their prison, but they pay dearly. I don't even count the real prostitutes, most of whom were forced into it one way or another anyway."

She tossed her head defiantly. "So I'm to be a compliant possession, am I? Never! I'd rather be a brave soul like Juanita, even if I had to pay for it."

He smiled then. "God knows you have courage, Ellen. What you've gone through would have broken a weaker woman. But you haven't got Juanita's realism and toughness of spirit. Like all American women, you're full of romantic ideas, and to bed down with a man you didn't love would destroy your image of yourself. Physical love should be a splendor and a glory, not a furtive shoddy act that leaves you with nothing but the taste of guilt. I like and admire you, and I want to continue to be friends."

Like, admire, friends... Cold comfort in an empty bed... "Why did you bring me here then?"

His smile, that maddening, complacent smile, became a grin. "Believe it or not, I really thought it would help your aches and bruises. When you got back on that horse today, I felt too much respect for you to keep you from trying it again as I wanted to. I know how much a hard fall like that hurts. Even so, I wouldn't have dared to bring you here if I hadn't had last night with Juanita, and I nearly lost my head at that. You're not an evil woman, love—only a desperately hurt one. Come on, we'd better go before I forget all my scruples."

"Tom?"

He looked at her.

"Thank you."

He smiled again and helped her out of the pool. They rode back in a companionable silence, at ease with each other in a way they had never been before. To come to the brink of physical passion and then draw back was more

difficult by far than picking up sticks from running horses, but now that it had been accomplished with his help, she felt as if she had performed with him some athletic feat so arduous that it gave them a trust and closeness she had never felt before with anyone else, not her father, not Rosa, Not Carlos.

10

The next morning Tom and the general disappeared into town, and Juanita showed no signs of being eager to rise when Ellen did. She wrinkled her nose. "You smell like a sulphur works. What were you and Tom up to last night?"

"He took me to a natural hot pool to ease the aches and pains I got from the fall yesterday. If it hadn't been for that, I wouldn't have been able to move today."

"Well, it smells as if you brought the pool back in here with you. The odor does go away after a while, doesn't it?" she asked anxiously.

Ellen left her to her own devices and wandered over to Alonzo's wagon where Anita was washing clothes. "What do you people do about bathing?" she asked.

Anita's eyes twinkled. "Often not much, and that little in cold water, but you're lucky this morning. You can use the washtub as soon as I'm through, and there'll be plenty of hot water left. We all bathed last night."

"You mean, right out in the open field like this?"

Anita laughed, looking suddenly younger despite her missing front tooth. "We have a canvas screen we use. I'll help you put it up."

While Anita was finishing, Ellen pinned up the wet clothes on a line strung between the wagons. "Where are you from?" Anita asked casually as she scrubbed little Alonzo's pants.

"California."

"Really? You talk like a Mexican. Most Americans we've met on our travels can't seem to get the hang of it. What made you come to Mexico in the middle of a revolution?"

"I came before it started. My husband has a *hacienda* between Guadalajara and Zacatecas. He was hurt terribly, and we were run off by bandits."

"So that's your husband? I thought he was just simple-minded." At the look on Ellen's face, she smiled reassuringly and patted her arm with a soapy hand. "I'm sure he'll get better soon. I thought your man was the blue-eyed one."

"He'd be a pretty sorry excuse for a husband if he were, with all he's been up to since we've been here."

Anita laughed again. "What about the other two? They seem an odd pair."

Ellen debated telling her, but the general's uniform couldn't have left much room for doubt. "He's a general who made an enemy of Huerta, and Juanita—well, they aren't married. Even Carlos and I weren't married in the church."

"Who is? When Alonzo and I cared about such things, we didn't have the money to pay the priest. Since we got along as well without the Church's blessing, we decided to go right on as we were. We did have little Alonzo baptized, though. It took six months to finish paying back Demetrio."

Ellen was surprised. "I thought everyone here thought they had to get married in the Church. Why, even the peons on our *hacienda*, poor as they were, got married by the priest."

"I know," Anita said shortly. "Alonzo and I didn't live on a *hacienda*, but the villagers where we did live all worked for one or another of the local *caciques* who were given our village land. On fifty centavos a day you had to borrow to have your children baptized, and then your husband had to borrow to have you buried. To make it worse, all of that borrowing that you could never pay back because you didn't even have enough to live on was all you could leave to your children since they had to assume your debt." Anita looked Ellen up and down thoughtfully. "I wonder how it was on your *hacienda*?"

Ellen blushed painfully. "I'm ashamed to say I don't know. Tom would know, he was the administrator."

"I'll just bet he would," Anita said grimly. "Strange, he doesn't seem the type. If I were you, I wouldn't go around telling just anybody that you had a *hacienda*. I've seen men beaten to death and girls raped and no one to turn to. Don Enrique, who was born as poor as my father, was given land under Diaz because he stole horses and got the money to bribe the officials in Cuernavaca. His son raped my sister and gave her a child. She became a prostitute because who would marry damaged goods? I hope your *hacienda* wasn't like that, but I wouldn't bet on it."

"There were occasional beatings, I know," Ellen said in a troubled voice, "but they were for cruelty to wives and children and animals. Nobody raped anybody, I'm sure of that."

"Oh? Were you all that aware of what went on?"

"I'd have heard. I delivered enough children for those women, someone would have told me, or at least told my helper Lupita."

"You actually dirtied your hands delivering peons'

children?" Anita's tone was unbelieving.

"Yes, I did," Ellen answered defiantly. "I set their bones and I gave them herbs for their fevers and headaches and dysentery. I tried to teach them about caring for sick children and why to be clean and how to eat, but I didn't get too far. With time, I might have."

Anita's look was friendlier. "Maybe I misjudged you. If so, I'm sorry."

"How did you and Alonzo get away?"

"We ran away. After my sister was raped, Alonzo said I would be next, and we left. I went back once when the circus travelled near there and was sorry for it. My mother and father were dead of the spotted fever, my brothers were slaves, and my sister was a whore."

"What will you do if the circus breaks up?"

"We'll make out somehow, we always have. Maybe Alonzo can get work on a fishing boat, or loading ships, until we can save enough to buy a little store. I'll miss the travelling, though, and Demetrio as well; he's been a good friend."

Anita helped her fill the tub and set up the canvas screen. She gave her hair three washings and rinsings, then soaped the rest of her. She could see when she stood up the bruises and abrasions from yesterday's fall. She was sitting down again in the tub trying to get all of the dirt out from under her nails when Tom stuck his head over the top of the canvas.

"Hurry up, will you? We've got a lot to do and only two days to do it in."

She slid down under the soapy water. "Didn't anyone teach you manners, Tom Kilpatrick? How dare you break into a lady's bath uninvited?" But she smiled.

He grinned back. "Then invite me. Anyhow, I'm glad you're not angry about last night. I seem to remember getting pretty pompous. By this morning I was kind of sorry I'd been such a pillar of morality."

She could see that Anita was dying of curiosity as to what their English conversation was about. "I'm not. You were right, as you know very well, and I don't hate you for it, I'm grateful."

"That doesn't sound like the feisty Elena Alvarez I always knew."

"Maybe I'm learning."

"In the meanwhile, quit wallowing in that tub and come help us. We've got a surprise, the general and I." He disappeared.

She dried herself off, put on clean clothes, and cleaned the tub. She thanked Anita and walked toward her wagon to put away the towel and soap and lay her soiled clothes aside for washing. Before she got there, she stopped in amazement, for there were two new flatbed wagons, one of them being swarmed over by the general, Tom, and Juanita, who seemed to know what a hammer was for. They had screwed on four corner posts, and were starting to nail on walls of boards from a stack piled on the other wagon.

"Hurry up, Elena, the general called. "You can hold while Juanita nails. We'll be putting up the posts on the other wagon. We've been formally invited to join the Circo de Demetrio, but we've got to provide our own wagons. Two of the mules can pull the one, and a mule and that great brute of a gelding of mine can pull the other. If I never get on a horse again, it will be too soon."

By the time they had to get ready for the first afternoon performances, the wagons were finished except for the doors. They all stood back to admire their handiwork. The new wood glistened, fairly begging for paint.

"Could I make a suggestion?" Ellen asked, not sure how everyone would take it. When they nodded, she went on, "I think it would be best if Carlos were in with me. I'm saying it now because it might make a difference as to how you set up the wagons. I'd say that Juanita could be in

with me, too, only she seems to keep different hours, and I wonder if she shouldn't be in with you and the general."

"I've got a better idea yet," Tom said. "Why don't I sleep in with you and Carlos and leave the general and Juanita with some privacy. I'm not keen on sitting out half the night the way I did last night."

"Then I want a partition across the wagon," Juanita ruled. "Fausto snores."

"You'll hear that through a partition," Tom objected.

"Maybe, but that way I have a little privacy." She smiled at Ellen as if they shared a joke. "When you get a bit long in the tooth like I am, you learn that lovers aren't really mad about seeing you the next morning all puffy and bare-faced with your hair looking a fright."

"Juanita," Ellen said, "I've been living with you and I've never seen you anything but beautiful."

"But oh my dear, what that cost me in effort!" Juanita laughed infectiously.

So it was settled. Juanita and the general and all of their extra baggage plus a kerosene cook stove would go in one wagon, and Tom and Carlos and Ellen in the other along with a portable forge and anvil. Tom built two bunks, one on top of the other, for Carlos and himself, and gave Ellen a canvas cot he had found in town. Laughing, he lifted Ellen in his arms and deposited her over the threshold. There was a wonderful sharp smell of new pine inside that reminded her of when her father and Joe had built the little hunting cabin up on the Squat near the Hurricane Deck country where few people had ever been. If she were there now...

"Would you like a partition, too?" Tom asked.

"Not unless you do. I think I can trust you to turn your back when I'm changing my clothes. But could we have a window? I'd really like that."

"Done. When we get the hardware for the doors tomorrow, we'll get glass cut as well. Maybe the general and

Juanita will want one, too. We could place it so that half would be on his side and half on hers." They grinned at each other.

The performances that Saturday went much better, for Ellen was careful to see that the mare's path was clear. "You know," she said to Tom afterward, "I think I could work out a more impressive act by snatching a handkerchief with my teeth."

"Ellen, for God's sake don't make things worse than they already are," Tom grumbled.

"You're wrong. This way I'd have two hands to hang on and pull myself up with. Actually, it would be safer."

He threw up his hands. "Have it your way, you always do."

After that they stood watching Demetrio put his head in an obliging César's mouth. César was making a miraculous recovery. Already his coat was improving, and he had lost his motheaten look. Demetrio would brush and comb him for the better part of an hour every day, talking to him all the time about how he was looking so much better and how it wouldn't be long now before he could resume his old acts to startle and stun all who saw him. Sometimes in the evening he would let César out when he was sure there were no town dogs around and sit with an arm around his neck in front of the fire. Otherwise they would drag the lion's wagon around so that he could watch the flames, his golden eyes half-closed and dreaming.

On Sunday they finished the wagons enough to move in. "All that's really left now," Tom said exultantly, "is to paint them. Look, besides the white primer I've got paint in red, blue, yellow, black, and green. We ought to have a contest to see who can do the best illustration."

They started in right away, each one taking a side of a wagon. For almost a week they worked on it between performances or after a day of driving. By acclamation

they gave Juanita first prize, a week free of cooking, washing clothes, or doing the dishes. With much laughter Tom and the general doubled at each when it would have been Juanita's turn. Against a red background she had painted an enormous serpent with the arms, shoulders, and head of a wicked woman, the scales all done in cleverly varied shades of blue and green. The serpent woman was picking a golden apple from a branch of leaves that intertwined gracefully to make a border all the way around the side of the wagon. Tom's maiden holding out a hand to a white unicorn with a golden horn, while in her other hand behind her back she held a knife, all against a green background as of a forest, was a close second. Since horses were the only things Ellen had ever learned to draw despite all those boring art lessons at the finishing school painting still lifes, she settled for a black and a white horse galloping over golden hills studded with dark green oaks. It sometimes made her homesick to look at it, crudely done as it was. The general had done a battle scene, complete with booming cannon and men falling wounded and dead. They had uniforms of fantastic colors, and their officers rode white horses, but they fell and died all the same.

The first night in their new quarters, Ellen lay awake for a while after putting Carlos to bed. He had seemingly settled down permanently to this state of eating if he were encouraged, going to the bathroom if he were led outside, and reliving scenes long past, many of them from his childhood. On this night Tom was still out by their fire.

"Tomás, Tomás!" Carlos cried. "The kite! Look out, it's getting tangled in the tree! *Cabrón*, why didn't you pay attention? For that, you can climb up and get it."

On an impulse, she sat down beside him in her nightgown and smoothed his shaggy hair. Both he and Tom had grown luxuriant mustaches, and she could hardly recognize in him anymore the Carlos she had known, for

which she was thankful. Better to care for this stranger than a caricature of the real Carlos, the lover who had borne her down on the fragrant golden grass beneath the moonlit sycamore trees. She could still close her eyes and smell the sweetness of the crushed grass, the maleness of tobacco and wine and himself on his breath, the familiar scent of horses in the background. She leaned over and kissed him on the lips, and was startled when he reached up and put his arms around her.

"Ah *querida*, it's been so long. Hurry to bed."

For a glorious moment she thought he had come to his senses, brought to life as in a fairy tale by the princess's kiss.

Then he went on, "Let's play the game you taught me last time—where's the champagne? Never will I have champagne ever again without remembering you, my sweet, and never was there champagne of so glorious a vintage. Come, my love, let me drink."

This was never herself he was remembering now. They had never played a game with champagne, nor played any game at all, for that matter. He had hardly even spoken to her even during the best of their lovemaking except for an occasional endearment. What was there in men that seemed to make them capable of such duplicity? Here she was, chained to this shell of a man who still was capable of hurting her, of belittling her as a woman. If he'd so wanted a woman with knowledge of esoteric tastes in wine, why hadn't he married her, she thought rebelliously, and left herself to the golden oak-covered hills she was so sick for. The sight of the startled stag, encarmined by the rising sun, flicked across her mind. Why, she thought finally, had he never taught her that game, a game she would never know now, a game that made the lovemaking she had once thought of as fulfilling seem childishly earnest. She burst into the tears she had never shed for Edmundo, for Carlos, for the child born too soon, for the violent

uprooting of her very existence that left her a fugitive fleeing with a cripple to a home that was no longer there.

She didn't know Tom had come in until he sat on the edge of her cot and gathered her in his arms. "There, there, love, it can't be as bad as all that." He patted her back and stroked her hair as Rosa used to do when she was a child. At last, as the storm of weeping subsided, he pulled out his handkerchief and wiped her eyes, giving it to her to blow her nose. "What happened?"

"It—it was a silly thing to do. I kissed Carlos, and for a moment I thought he knew me, but then it wasn't me he knew, it was someone else he remembered, and I guess I just went to pieces." She blew her nose again. "It wasn't just Carlos, it was the baby and Edmundo and everything. I'm sorry."

"Don't be. You're better off getting it off your chest. I've worried that you didn't cry. You—you seemed frozen somehow, as if everything that happened had turned you into a block of ice inside."

"You know all about that feeling, don't you, Tom?" she asked with sudden insight. He had always seemed so self-contained, so confident, and all the time he had that iceberg inside, a cold heavy thing with sharp edges. She recognized it now, all right.

"I guess you could say I know something about it," he said lightly. "After all, there aren't many who don't know it at one time or another."

"Why does it have to be that way?" she demanded. "Why do we all have to stumble about hurting each other, even killing each other? You've had a lot more experience than I have, Tom, you always seem to have an answer for everything, tell me."

"I don't know," he said wearily. "If I knew that, I'd be happily married in a country where they never heard of killing, and I'd have a million kids." He patted her on the bottom. "Go to bed, Ellén. That's what I'm going to do."

Go to bed and get some sleep."

Early the next morning, everyone worked hard emptying the big tent of benches, ring lumber, trapezes, ropes and all of the other circus paraphernalia and storing it in the vacant baggage wagons. Next came the tent itself that collapsed in a welter of weathered patched canvas and had to be folded up carefully. The tent stakes were pulled up and the lines coiled. When they were finished, the two wagons were packed without one extra inch of excess space.

"If we ever got another act," Demetrio joked, "even if it needed only a dog leash, we'd have to get another wagon for it."

They were going to wait until after lunch to leave, for their next town was several days away. Tom and the general used the time to put in the windows. They had even provided rings and curtain material that Ellen and Juanita had hemmed and hung on the wooden curtain rods that had been fastened above the windows. The men had also slaughtered another calf the day before, and while the women cooked part of the meat, had begun sun drying the rest, festooning the wagons with strips of salted meat hung on strings. At night they took it in to keep it safe from coyotes and wild dogs. They were stocked with onions, green tomatoes, garlic, red and green chiles, dried corn, salt, sugar, coffee, wheat and corn flour, and beans. They would depend on each town as they came to it for fresh fruit and vegetables, though from what she had seen in Zacatlán, Ellen didn't think there would be much worth buying. *Chayotes* maybe, the pear-shaped Mexican green squash, and the strong little yellow *limones*, but the other fruit and vegetables were either picked too green or else limp and insect-ridden.

The lake was low, and they could easily ford it, turning southwest then and skirting the reed-fringed Lake Atonilco that became further along the almost dry bed of

Lake Sayula. There are multitudes of wild duck, grebes, loons, grackles, blue and white herons, and storks. They even saw occasional roseate spoonbills, large pink birds that closely resembled flamingos except for their bills that ended in a flat disk perfect for scooping up lake life from the rich mud bottom. From among the thick lake reeds they could hear bitterns barking, and the twittering of the blackbirds that swooped and swung in great fluid flocks looking for seeds and insects. Tom and the general contented themselves with shooting some wild ducks for the pot from time to time, but with three shots from the shotgun she borrowed from Demetrio, Anita bagged enough blackbirds to make a delicious stew, savory with chile and herbs.

To their right rose steep mountains, grassy and dotted with scrub cactus on the lower slopes, but black with a mantle of pines spilling over the crest. The deer laid up in the heat of the day, but even down toward the road they saw occasional coyotes, and once they flushed a bobcat that bounded angrily off up the slope and disappeared in a small wooded ravine. Their caravan crawled slowly along the dusty wagon track, nine wagons drawn mostly by mules, some brightly painted, others weathered. Tom rode the nervous head-throwing black he had gotten in Guadalajara, and Ellen rode Juanita's sorrel mare. Juanita and the general drove the wagons. Ellen thought of how tantalizing they would look to any passing gang of bandits, and shuddered.

That night they climbed partway up a lower slope to where a stream ran next to a level shoulder large enough for the wagons. Not wanting to hunt for horses and mules the next morning, they made a rope corral that would serve unless the animals became frightened and tethered the two riding horses where there was plenty of feed. Before long there were several cooking fires going and pots hung on them.

"No use trying to sneak around with nine circus wagons and a lion," Demetrio said, "so we may as well make ourselves comfortable."

That night Marlina wasn't feeling well, and Ellen invited the trapeze team to eat with them so the girl wouldn't have to cook supper. The three came silently yet hesitantly up to the cooking fire, where Tom and the general were each having a snort of mescal in their tin cups. When they offered some to their visitors, however, all three shook their heads shyly. Ellen took Marlina aside.

"Tell me what's wrong. Is it your period?"

The girl nodded her head in an agony of embarrassment.

"Don't be ashamed, that's half the reason you're having trouble. I just happen to have some medicine that will help you, if you'll take it."

Marlina didn't say anything, only looked at her hopefully. Her normally golden skin was greyish, she had dark circles under her eyes, and lines of pain made the delicacy of her features skull-like. Ellen went to her wagon and got her medicine bag. From it she extracted a large brown bottle labelled Tincture of Laudanum—Poison. Into a small empty bottle she poured as much as it would hold, stoppered it, and returned to the girl.

"Take a teaspoon every half hour for pain until the pain eases, and then stop unless it comes back later. Have you got a hot water bottle? No? Well, take this one for now, and I'll heat some water for you over the fire after our supper is done. There, there now—there's nothing to cry about." She poured the laudanum in the spoon and gave it to the girl. When they got back to the fire, Ellen asked her if she would like to go back to her wagon and lie down, but Marlina shook her head.

"If she's with people, she doesn't think about it so much," Emilio explained. "Alcohol helps, but not enough, and she gets drunk on very little. Then the next

day she can't do our acts. That's why we don't drink, either."

Ellen watched Marlena, saw her begin to relax. In half an hour she gave her another dose and was satisfied to see her exhibit a positive sense of well being. Her brothers, seeing that she was feeling better, actually became voluble.

"We've been doing acrobatics, tightrope and trapeze for five years now. There used to be four of us, a much better number, but Esperanza was killed."

"How did that happen?" Juanita asked sympathetically. "On the trapeze?"

Emilio shook his head, hesitated a moment, then went on. "We were with a circus in Veracruz then that had an elephant, Sofia. We all did many things besides our own acts, and Esperanza and Sofia worked out an event that always made the audience gasp. After being picked up in Sofia's trunk and several other things, Esperanza would lie down and the elephant would put a foot on her and lifted her trunk in a salute. It was very effective. On the night she died, a puma was accidentally let into the main ring from the lion tamer's cage, and Sofia became so enraged that she forgot she had a foot on Esperanza, and put her whole weight on the middle of Esperanza's body. I was lucky, I fainted. Ever since then Marlena has had terrible cramps. We've taken her to doctors, but they say they can do nothing." He shook his head.

"How did you get into the circus business?" Tom asked to change the subject.

This time it was Francisco who answered. "We are part Yaqui," he said proudly. "Our people were never conquered, though many tried. Even the Spaniards ceded us our lands in Sonora rather than fight us anymore. Then Diaz decided he wanted to give away our lands and establish yet more of the terrible *haciendas* that have killed so many who work them."

Ellen noticed Tom wince. No wonder Anita had told her not to talk about Carlos's *hacienda*.

"The Yaquis fought for seven years until our famous war chief Cajeme was captured and executed. A truce was signed, and the Yaquis accepted smaller lands. Even this wasn't enough for the greedy Mexicans, and they tried to take this land away as well. Soon after we were born, soldiers were being given a large bounty for every pair of Yaqui warrior ears they brought in. The only good thing about it was that a lot of Mexican ears were claimed by the soldiers to have been taken from Yaquis, but of course it was always the poor farmers who were killed, never the large landowners or government officials. Before the bounty, the whole town of Navajoa was imprisoned and so many hanged there wasn't rope enough and they had to keep cutting bodies down so that the rope could be used again.

"Our father, who was part *gringo*, took to the mountains with many other warriors to fight on. They might be fighting still except that their families were rounded up and sent to the seaport of Guaymas. Marlena was ten, and Emilio and Esperanza and I older. There were three children younger. From Guaymas the ship took us to San Blas. Never have I seen such insects, mosquitos and worse, stinging gnats. Later on, some came down with malaria.

"From San Blas we went on foot to San Marcos. *Caray*, what a journey! Little to eat and struggling over steep mountains, watching as many dropped by the way, some of them mercifully shot, others left to die of exhaustion and thirst. We lost the two youngest of our family in those mountains. From San Marcos we went by rail in cattle cars to Mexico City, where we might have frozen except that we were packed in so tight, and then on to Veracruz.

"The next stage was to be by ship to Progreso in

Yucatan, where we would be put to work on the *henequen haciendas*. They split up our family among groups going to different boats, but the four of us older children managed to get back together. We never saw our mother or little brother again. Our boat wasn't very big, hardly more than a fishing boat, and they had many of us crowded up on the deck as well as in the hold. We hadn't been long out of port when a norther came whistling down the coast and drove our overloaded boat almost ashore. We and many of the others jumped into the sea. Some were drowned, some were shot, and some like us actually got ashore and hid in a coconut palm plantation.

"We made our way back to Veracruz hoping to find our mother, but her group was already gone. Our little brother had been shot when he and others tried to escape. Actually, he was probably only trying to find our mother. We were desperate as to how to get out of Veracruz, for there were soldiers everywhere looking for escaped Yaquis. When we got to the outskirts, we saw a circus, and thinking that we might possibly be allowed to travel with them, we crept to the edge of the big tent and hid."

"Go on, then what happened?" Juanita said impatiently.

Francisco shrugged. "That was when we met Demetrio. His father was a famous clown who had begun to drink too much after his wife died, or he never would have been with a circus. If Demetrio hadn't been so set on a circus of his own, he could have been a famous clown as well and made a lot of money in Mexico City. Wait until César gets well enough and you'll see what I mean."

Marlena looked a little glassy eyed, but she spoke in a more lively manner than they had ever heard from her. "Oh, how we worked! At night, after the last performance was over, we would work on the trapezes by lamplight until we were so exhausted we could hardly hang on to the bar. Why we didn't break our necks, I'll never know. I

wouldn't do that now in such poor light. All day we were practicing acrobatics when we weren't performing. Demetrio put us in his father's clown act.

"His father was a wonderful performer when he was sober, which wasn't often. Even drunk, he was better than the others except Demetrio, but once in a while you could see a flash of real genius. There came a time, though, when he was too drunk to perform, and from then on Demetrio had to carry the act. We were in Puebla, near Mexico City, when his father got so sick. *Hijole*, but it was cold! His father got so drunk he passed out on the ground at night during a performance, and we didn't miss him for several hours. He died two days later in the little hospital in Puebla, raving out of his head. It was after that Demetrio decided to start his own circus. If it weren't for the revolution, we would have gotten bigger and bigger and only be playing the large cities by now."

"If it weren't for the revolution," the general said grimly, there are many of us who would be doing something else in a different place. Blast Diaz for senile old fool! If he'd only quit when he should have and put a good man in his place, none of this would have happened. Huerta won't last long, either—you wait and see. He's an incorrigible drunk. Zapata in the south already hates him, and there will be more trouble in the north where they'll have no love for Madero's assassin."

"Ellen and her husband are victims of the revolution, too," Juanita added. "His brother, who fought for Madero in the north, was murdered by brigands who should have gotten down on their knees to him had they been true revolutionaries, and you can see what happened to her husband. He may never be right in the head again."

Bless Juanita, who put them on the right side without ever saying what they had been doing before they had to flee, Ellen thought.

"The next town we come to will be Tocoalco," Emilio

said to Ellen, wrapping a *tortilla* around some beans and meat. "We went this far last year, and at that time there was a young doctor there. Maybe he can tell you something about your husband."

Soon after supper, they were all in bed, for tomorrow would be another long journey. Ellen was asleep even before Tom came in from taking Carlos to the bathroom, a part of the hurt man's care he had taken from her, saying it wasn't seemly.

The next day the upper lake, Atotonilco, gave way to the dry lake, Sayula. There was still water in a large depression toward the middle, but most of the lake bed was exposed, a great expanse of red-brown silt that turned to powder when touched and reflected the heat of a sun strong even in February. There were no birds here, and though the mountains on their right looked the same, no wildlife was apparent either. It was as if along with the lake the burning rays of the sun had dried up all life around its borders.

That night and the next and the next they kept on past the long dry lake where the dust devils were dancing funnels of red-brown powder across the dry surface. Late at night they finally stumbled into the outskirts of To-coalco and parked in a field. It was so late that after the animals were all settled down and fed, they ate cold suppers and dropped into a dreamless sleep of pure exhaustion. The general had experienced the worst time, for he suffered from a delicate rectal problem that didn't allow him to sit on the hard jolting wagon seat for long at a time, and he spent a great deal of the day walking since a horse was no easier on him than the wagon. His clothes now hung on him, and he had the aged, wrinkled look of a man recently fat who has suddenly lost a lot of weight. He claimed, however, that he was sleeping better than he had in years.

"Look out, *chiquita*," he laughed at Juanita. "Before

long I'll have you yelling for mercy."

"Hardly any chance of that," she retorted acidly, but then she too laughed her bubbling infectious laugh that always made everyone join in.

This time Ellen managed to stay awake until Tom came in. She watched him put Carlos to bed and then obligingly turned away from him while he undressed.

"Are we going to take Carlos to the doctor tomorrow?" she asked, looking at the swirl of lines around a knot on the wooden wall.

"Don't you think that would be a good idea?" he countered.

She hesitated. "I guess so. It's just that right now I can hope anything I like."

"Remember, a young doctor out in the middle of nowhere doesn't necessarily have the final word. However, there may be something we should be doing for him that we're not, and I'd like to find out that much at least." She heard him climb the short wooden ladder to the top bunk.

"I know," she said, turning over. "I'm fretting because I'm afraid of what he'll say. It must be a terrible injury for Carlos to remain so docile, so dependent."

"No use worrying over it now," Tom advised. "Try to get some sleep."

Early the next morning she drew back the curtains on the window right by her bed to see what the place where they were camped looked like. To her great astonishment, she found herself face to face with four little urchins who had their noses glued to the window glass so hard they were white and flattened on the end. The children were as startled as she, and though one gave her a toothless smile, they all ran off across the field shrieking with excitement and glee. She smiled and turned to find Tom watching.

"It won't be long before everyone knows we're here," she remarked. "When do you think we should take Carlos?"

"We have to find out first if there still is a doctor, and then what his office hours are. I promised Demetrio I'd shoe the piebald mares this morning, and I haven't noticed that most doctors here in Mexico have hours before noon, if then."

While the women made breakfast, Tom and the general lifted down the forge and with a rope and pulley the anvil as well. On the walls at the back of the wagon were hung on spikes hammers, tongs, bellows, and horse shoe blanks of various sizes. Tom emptied charcoal into the forge and after much fanning managed to start a fire.

"I'll have plenty of time for breakfast," he said. "I want to build up that fire slowly."

After they had all eaten the everlasting meat and beans, with *atole*, a hot drink of fine cornmeal mixed with milk—in this case goat—they scattered to their various jobs. Soon the almost melodic clanging of Tom's hammer on the anvil could be heard as he began shaping the first of the new shoes. Juanita cleaned up while Ellen began washing a huge pile of clothes. They had put Carlos to picking the dried beans clean of stones, sticks, and straw, a job that he seemed content to do by the hour. The general was helping to unload the baggage wagons and pound in the tent stakes. Ellen had never realized how hard-working circus folk were, and certainly never in her own life had she worked so hard at what she had always considered menial tasks. As she scrubbed hard at the soiled clothes, she fell once more in a reverie that glittered with the sun on green waves breaking along a reef on a distant shore.

11

Having found out from the ubiquitous chil- that there was indeed a doctor still in town, at noon they dressed Carlos in clean clothes and set off on horseback for the doctor's office on the main street of town. To-coalco was much larger than Zacatlán, owing its prosperity to many small farms and a large *hacienda* in the area that flourished because of the plentiful water. Part of the reason Lake Sayula dried up after the rainy season was over, they were told, was because water that used to go into the lake was diverted for farming. The main street was cobbled, which must have been a godsend during the rains, when dirt roads turned into rivers of mud. They soon saw the sign: "Dr. Antonio Garcia Soto, *cirugia, ninos y partos*, 12-6, 6-8."

"If he does surgery, pediatrics, and obstetrics," Tom observed, "he must know something from sheer experience."

As they walked in, they found the tiled waiting room

almost full, and settled themselves to wait. There were mothers with babies wrapped in *rebozos*, the shawl that was part of a uniform for the poor women. An old man sat patiently with bare feet and legs covered with sores. There was a boy of about ten with his arm in a cast and several working men with various parts of their anatomy banded. Far from having the empty vacant look of most people in doctors' waiting rooms, these people were engaged in lively conversation that halted only momentarily when Tom and Ellen and Carlos entered.

"Come from the circus, have you?" a woman with a baby asked. She looked nearer the age to be the baby's grandmother than his mother. The baby himself was giving off the constant thin mewling cry that Ellen knew meant he was sick. "When's the first performance?"

"This afternoon at four. What's wrong with the baby?" Ellen couldn't help being curious, for this was in her province.

The woman turned back the *rebozo* to reveal a baby so grey and wizened it looked like an ancient changeling. "I don't think this one will live," the mother said knowledgeably. "My milk dried up on me and I tried to feed him cow's milk, but he vomits it right away. Now he's got diarrhea as well."

"Sometimes they'll do well on goat's milk when they can't keep cow's milk down," Ellen suggested.

"Is that a fact?" the woman said, interested. "I've had fifteen children, ten of them living, and I never heard that."

The others in the room were following this conversation avidly. Ellen thought privately that the mother was right, the baby would die anyway, and they would all shake their heads wisely and say it was the fault of the goat's milk that the circus lady had said to try.

The door to the inner sanctum suddenly flew open. "When are you damned people going to learn to bring your children to me before they're already dying?" A

clean-shaven bespectacled man in his thirties with a stethoscope around his neck was berating a woman with what was apparently another dying baby wrapped in her *rebozo*.

"It is God's will," she said calmly.

"Then why bring them to me?"

"Because perhaps it is God's will that you cure him after all."

The doctor rolled his eyes upward, then beckoned to the old man with the ulcerated legs. "Come along, grandfather, and we'll see what we can do." He turned to Tom as the old man preceded him into the inner office. "You're from the circus, aren't you? What's wrong?"

"It's him," Tom said, indicating Carlos. "He took a bad blow to the head, and we'd like to have your opinion."

"Hmm. All right, I'll take you next. The rest of these people are getting a vacation from work as long as they're here. The women aren't having to grind corn and hoe weeds, and the workers have time off from the *hacienda*. They'll all have a good rest and gossip session."

The door had no sooner closed than someone asked how Carlos had been hurt. Ellen gave a truncated account that almost implied he had been attacked by bandits while with the circus. One of the women nodded her head sympathetically.

"There are some bandits that come through here, too, but happily they don't stop. The only local ones come down out of those mountains there. Their *jefe* is called Manco, the one-handed one. They say he lost his hand on the *hacienda* here over some woman. They say they are revolutionaries, but I call them thieves."

"Look out, Marta," one of the men warned. "One day Manco is going to come down out of those mountains and revenge his hand, now that the soldiers have gone back to Colima. Where men like that are concerned, the walls have ears."

The conversation ceased as the inner door opened

again and the doctor ushered out the old man, his legs wrapped in bandages. "And remember," the doctor said, "come back every day so I can change the dressings. Understand? Every day."

When the three of them were inside the office, the doctor sighed. "I won't see him for a month, during which time he'll have gone to every *curandero* for twenty kilometers around. They'll all give him a different herb to tie on his leg and a different tea to drink, and then he'll be back here again. If they'd just have him chew the herb and put the tea on his sores, he'd be as well off as he'd be with me. If I could cure old age and poor circulation, I could cure his sores. Now what have we got here?" He looked inquiringly at the three of them.

Carlos was all cleaned up, and no one looking at him would have thought there was anything wrong with him. No matter how you dressed him up, though, Ellen thought, he didn't look as elegant, as cocksure, as he had even in that ragged bathing suit in California. He had the look of a dressed up peon, with the lack of drive, lack of alertness that grinding poverty put on people.

"It's his head," Tom said. "He took some blows and he hasn't been the same since."

The doctor began gently feeling the head of the unresisting Carlos with sensitive fingers. "How long ago did all this happen?"

"About three weeks ago."

Three weeks! It must have been longer than that. Did it take only three weeks to wipe out a way of life, to destroy a whole system of values? Three weeks to make a change so sweeping she wondered there wasn't a break in the lifeline on her hand to indicate it, like the deformed ring on a tree trunk once scarred by fire.

"Was he unconscious?"

"For some hours."

"Did he bleed from the nose and ears?"

“Yes.”

The doctor went on with his careful probing. At last he said, “The only thing I can find—and that’s more than enough—is a depression here, probably a depressed fracture. If we were in a good hospital, I’d say to try operating, but even so it looks to me as if there’s been some permanent brain damage. In three weeks simple swelling of the brain should have gone down and any clotting reabsorbed, at least to some extent. From what you say, he has improved slightly, but not much. That improvement was probably the result of natural healing. The problem with severe head injuries is that if any portion of the brain is actually damaged, not merely contused, there is no way to restore its function. He doesn’t faint, or go dizzy, his eye movements and pupil size are all right, his reflexes work. All those signs that would point to an intracranial clot that could be relieved by surgery are absent.” He looked intently at Ellen. “Are you his wife?” When she nodded, he looked regretful and said, “I’m sorry, but I doubt there’s much any doctor can do. By all means get another opinion, but for what it’s worth, that is mine.”

Ellen realized that she had known this all along. She looked at the doctor absolutely dry eyed and asked, “Then there is nothing that we haven’t been doing that we should do?”

A little puzzled by her calmness, the doctor answered. “Nothing. If he were going to be bothered by jolting, it would have happened long since. You’ve done well to give him simple tasks and teach him to eat.”

“Are you sure about this?”

Tom’s voice had a hoarse, strained quality, and Ellen belatedly fastened her attention on him. His face was white under the tan, and in his eyes she could read an overwhelming grief. Dear heaven, had he really been entertaining the hope that Carlos could somehow be repaired, that one day the three of them would ride off

happily into the sunset? Calm, reliable Tom—for him to maintain this wild illusion was so uncharacteristic she found it difficult to comprehend.

"I'm sure—or at least as sure as the vagaries of the human body have ever allowed me to be. You've probably noticed that his whole character has changed. If it's any comfort, the man you knew no longer exists, and is certainly not aware of this catastrophe." He shrugged. "Perhaps an operation might help marginally, but the risk would be enormous. I would advise against it. He isn't in pain now, but tinkering with him could change that."

All the time they were talking, Carlos sat in the chair where he had been put, dreaming with open eyes of a happier past. Though she had dreaded what the doctor would say, now that it was said, it was as if a boil had been lanced. At least now she could begin to deal with reality instead of fears and hopes and dreams. She had now irrevocably lost everything, and as a festering foxtail will sometimes harden in a horse's jaw to a painless lump of protective calcium, so the death of all hope finished the cementing of feeling inside her. The one vulnerable spot left had been her feeling of trust in Tom, as if he were some invincible bulwark between her and whatever evil might threaten. Now she could see that he too had been dealt a mortal blow and that she could no longer look to him for comfort. She was alone.

In silence they paraded past the curious stares of the waiting patients and in silence they walked back to the circus, leading their horses. As if by some sort of agreement, none of the circus folk asked them about the doctor. Tom's face was a mask, absolutely expressionless. After they had settled Carlos down to picking over beans again, Tom mounted his black horse and rode off toward the mountains, his figure finally blurring and shimmering in the heat waves coming up from the dirt track.

"Doctors can do nothing." Juanita's words were a statement, not a question.

Ellen nodded wearily. "When they hit him, they broke his skull. His brain was damaged, and it seems there is no way to restore it." She was still looking off after Tom, who had disappeared behind a rise.

"And Tomás?"

Ellen looked at her then. "I think he died a little. I had no idea he thought Carlos could be cured."

"You knew all along?"

"Knew is the wrong word—suspected is more like it. A man like Carlos doesn't change so completely without something terrible having happened to him. Look at him, he's like a not very bright child. Oh God, I wish I were dead!"

Juanita's eyes snapped. "Now it is *you* who are acting like a not very bright child! You have leaned on Tomás and sucked his courage like a calf nursing at its mother's udder. It's your turn to give of yourself. The night Tomás spent with me, did you know he cried in his sleep? And all that time, in fact ever since you left the *hacienda*, it is he who has been comforting you. Have you ever once tried to find out what he was feeling?" Her tone was loaded with disgust.

Ellen was taken aback. "W—with Carlos and the baby and all, I never thought—" The unfairness of the attack hit her then. "What did *he* have to be so upset about? He hadn't lost a wife or a child, only a friend."

Juanita looked at her dumbstruck. "Only a friend! *Diós mío*, how can you say that? I have to think that you've not had many friends. If you want to know, I think Tomás loved Carlos far more than you did, and he feels his loss as you never could."

Was that really true, Ellen thought. Juanita was right, she had never had any real friends. All of her life had been

taken up with her father and Rosa. She supposed Billy Morton was a friend, but had she really even missed him? No. When she thought of Coxo, it wasn't because of Billy but because of a lost innocence, an all but forgotten world where the sun danced on the ocean and the most serious thing in her mind was whether the next wave would give her a good ride or not. Yet her intellect could not bridge the gap to her feelings. Better not to feel. She would stop taking from Tom; he had, after all, nothing left to give her anyway. She would move carefully through the rest of whatever life the bandits and the revolution left her, not giving, not taking. At least there would be nothing left to lose.

"You may be right, Juanita," Ellen answered her calmly. "Who wants to love, when you're going to lose it all anyway? Look at you, you must have loved in your time, and here you are stuck with an, aging caricature of a warrior. If that's what love leaves you, no thank you."

Juanita's anger had disappeared as fast as it had sprung up. The look she gave Ellen was strangely like pity. "When I was fifteen years old, I was raped by my stepfather—or rather, by my mother's lover since he never married her. I had a baby that died to dysentery soon after it was born. My mother washed other people's clothes in Mexico City and my stepfather didn't work at all. I had eight brothers and sisters. There was a dance recital of a famous Spanish dancer, Carmelita Alarcón. A friend and I managed to sneak into the theater the afternoon of her performance. We hid there five hours and at last saw her dance. That was enough. I ran away from home and I used my body to become a dancer myself. The only time I was really alive was when I danced. The marvellous feeling when the performance went well and the sound of the applause, they were better than any lovemaking.

"At last, though, I saw that I would never have the money and influence to become a top dancer in Mexico

City. I could get all the engagements I wanted in the cafés, and many people said I was better than the famous dancers, but there was no way I could get the theater engagements. So I went to Guadalajara, and by some judicious lying about what I'd done in Mexico City, I got my theater engagements after all. You wouldn't believe the number of beds I crawled in and out of while all this went on. Men meant nothing to me.

"However, dancing is a hard master. I am forty-five, would you believe it? In my thirties I found that I could no longer do what I'd done in my twenties. My muscles began to cramp at night enough to make me feel like screaming, and my knees and hips began to ache. Spanish dancing requires strong legs, and like those of a horse run too long on hard streets, mine began to give out. The reason I can do it now is because I'm on ground, not hard boards, and even at that I'm cheating.

"When I retired, I had plenty of *patrons* to turn to, and I led a gay life. I drank too much and lived too hard, all to forget that never again would I feel that exultation, hear that thunderous clapping of hands. A man who is dead now rescued me. He took me off to his *granja*, country house, and with a remarkable demonstration of patience and perseverance, he showed me that in the end love is the only thing we have that will sustain us through everything: love for husbands, wives, children, lovers, parents, friends. As long as you can love, you are still alive. When you are afraid to love, you may as well be dead.

"That man Carlos's uncle, whose wife and children had all been taken from him during the great cholera epidemic of the 1890's. Since then, when I've thought of feeling sorry for myself or sulking at fate, his words all come back to me. Fausto may be vain and foolish at times, but don't underestimate him. Anyone who went from sergeant to general in the Mexican Army had remarkable ingenuity

and persistence. It takes guts to steal on that scale."

Juanita patted Ellen's arm. "Sometimes knowing that someone else has had as hard a time as you is a comfort. You have courage, Elena, you must use it. Tom will need you, for you are his last link with Carlos as he once was. Be kind to him, even if you can't love him."

Whatever was she talking about? Love Tom? Last of all! He had no use for her, he'd made that plain at the sulphur pool. When there is no one to lose, you can't be hurt again. That was the whole answer, not to be hurt again. Without replying, she turned and slowly walked away, leaving Juanita looking after her with a mixture of worry and pity on her face.

Demetrio decided that they would have only one performance that night since they would be here for the following week. Tocoalco, it seemed, was having the annual fiesta for its patron saint, and Demetrio had obtained permission from the delighted mayor to keep the circus there. Country folk and workers for miles around would descend on the town this weekend. In return for a cut of the profits, the town authorized all kinds of pedlars and entertainers to hawk their offerings on the plaza and along the streets. The crowd that night was a good natured one, especially since one whole section of benches was occupied by children Demetrio had directed to be let in for free.

"They'll spread the word of our wonders all over town, and no one will be able to resist coming in the next few days. It is like throwing a stone in a pool of water and watching the ripples spread," he explained.

Though worried by Tom's absence past dark, Ellen was nevertheless interested to see what Demetrio, Alonzo, Gregorio, and the general were erecting the barred section of a lion taming cage. So César was to make his debut at last! She wondered how they would ever get the gentle old

beast to do anything frightening enough to warrant a cage.

"What are you going to do if Tom doesn't show up?" Ellen asked Juanita.

The little woman shrugged. "Most of my dancing was solo—I was a *prima danseuse*," she said proudly. "I do not need Tomás or anyone else. *Pobrecito*, I wonder where he is. I hate to think of him miserable and alone."

Ellen said nothing. She wasn't going to be made to feel guilty. After all, he did take off by himself, and he certainly didn't invite her to go with him. Let him go. He would find out soon enough that her way was best. No feeling, no hurt. She felt as if she were made of ice, hard and cold and impervious. For her, there would never be warmth again.

The evening was warm, a harbinger of the hot season that would come in a month's time, in April. Inside the tent there was a strong smell of animals and unwashed bodies; Demetrio always tried to pick ragged dirty children to let in free. Because they were going to be here for so long, he had gotten wood shavings for the performing area of the tent, and the sharp aromatic smell all but drowned the ranker odors. As they all marched around the perimeter near the benches, the sleazy satin costumes looking rich in the carbide lamplight, she thought again of what Juanita had said to her earlier. If counting on love ended you up little better than a prostitute, Ellen could do without it. The ice within had even spread over her desire, smothering it in a suffocating blanket of cold. Around and around the tent they went, Alonzo playing his horn, Doroteo the dwarf beating a drum, and Gregorio smashing together a battered pair of cymbals, sometimes pretending to catch his long false clown's nose between them, to the delight of the children.

When Alonzo had sawed Anita in half and taken his bows, it was Ellen's turn. She found that along with

desire, fear had been allayed as well, and she swung down impossibly low to snatch the handkerchief in her teeth and gallop on, the mare a model of steadiness after all this time. The crowd had clapped politely when she had snatched up the stick with her outstretched hand, but when on the second run she picked the handkerchief off the stick with her teeth, they actually cheered. The general made his rabbit head; Emilio, Francisco, and Marlana did their trapeze act, and then came a pause. The audience waited, expectant.

Suddenly the silence was broken by loud roars that could only come from an angry, ferocious beast. César's wagon was rolled in and stopped opposite the door to the big cage. In the confines of the wagon César could be seen stalking up and down, lashing his tail. Alonzo and Raul, looking frightened, timidly opened the big cage and then slid back the wagon bars. With a veritable howl of rage, César sprang into the big cage and trotted around it roaring, occasionally standing on his hind legs against the bars. Next appeared Demetrio, immaculate in white puttees, shining black boots, black tails, and top hat. He was pulling on white gloves as he came, a long, wicked-looking whip tucked under his arm. Surely, Ellen thought incredulously, he wouldn't use a whip on César.

Demetrio entered the cage, the light flashing on his gold-rimmed spectacles. There was just the hint of a strut in his stride, and this coupled with his dandified appearance, made him somehow more of a figure of fun than a hero, Ellen realized with dismay. There were even a few titters from the audience. The titters ceased, however, as the sound of the whip came with a sharp crack like a shot from a gun. César snarled and cowered, looking even more menacing than he had before. Demetrio picked up a chair and cracked the whip again, but there was something about his movements that was overdone. That he all but minced was even more obvious when seen in relation

to the growling brute he was trying to assert his mastery over. There was another nervous titter that only increased when he glared at the audience.

After much posing and preening, he finally got César to jump sullenly up on a high wooden stool in the cage. Then came a nerve-shattering series of thrusts and parries to make the lion sit up on his haunches. This time Demetrio seemed actually petulant, as if he were addressing a naughty child. At this point the titters turned into giggles and then to laughter. That this pompous, posing fop, for that was what they finally recognized him to be, actually thought he was going to make this angry lion sit up was both ridiculous and frightening all at the same time. Ellen was appalled.

Demetrio kept at it, poking at César with the whip and the chair. At last César became impatient, and with a snarl he knocked the chair out of the man's hand with such force that it broke into pieces against the bars of the cage. The crowd gasped. Demetrio cracked the whip again and apparently struck César with it right in the face. The lion gave a bloodcurdling roar, and to the accompaniment of shouts and screams from the audience, launched himself at Demetrio, pinning him flat on his back on the cage floor with two enormous paws. César seemed to smile then, and after a pause still punctuated by sounds of distress from the benches, put out a great pink tongue and proceeded to wash Demetrio's face with it.

There was a dead silence for seconds, and then a huge guffaw of laughter all but lifted the tent from its moorings. They all, Ellen included, realized that they had been had by a master clown and showman, and they were delighted. As an encore, Demetrio, consciously droll now, put his head in César's mouth to the accompaniment of Doroteo's drum, and emerged holding his nose with one hand and a pair of large pink bloomers with the other. The crowd loved it. From then on they could do no

wrong. The children kept calling Alonzo back to do his act with the tops again, and they cheered the three trapeze artists during their high tightrope act.

Then came the clown act where the team of goats led by Raul pulled in a cart with Doroteo sitting in it. As they entered the tent, however, Ellen sensed something different when she heard a shout of laughter that spread down the benches like a ripple of wind over a field of *milo*. In place of Doroteo, César sat in the cart clad in a polka-dot dress with a large yellow ribbon in his mane, and resting on the side of the cart a paw in which was clutched the stem of a huge paper flower. Behind the wagon came one of the mules pushing to help the goats and as unconcerned about the lion as they. He had on a straw boater and a large paper collar with a polka-dot bow tie. Behind him came Doroteo dressed as a little boy with a streamered hat, short pants, and a balloon. Everyone laughed until the tears came at this family outing. All the performers gathered in the ring then for the grand finale and exited singing a popular song of the day, "*Adios, Muchacho, Adios.*"

Ellen was still smiling as she got Carlos ready for bed. Though he had seen the whole performance, he seemed as incapable of laughter as he was of noticing the present. She sighed, and realized she missed being able to relive César's performance with Tom. She had just drifted off to sleep when she heard an approaching male voice singing.

A frog he would a-wooing go,

So off her set with his opera hat,
Heighho, says Rowley!

And on his way he met with a Rat.

With a rowley-powley, gammon and spinach,
Heighho, says Anthony Rowley!

There was a sharp sound at the wagon door and a muttered curse. She reached for the matches and lit the lamp.

"I didn't know if you were coming back or not."

"Oh, I'm back all right," he said, swaying slightly. "I wanted to have the guts to take off for good, and I started to, but I couldn't do it in the end."

"Some friend you are, thinking of leaving Carlos like that," she said evenly.

"Well, I didn't do it, did I?" Tom said impatiently. He lifted a mescal bottle and drank the last of it, making a face. "Christ, that's filthy tasting stuff!" He dropped it on the floor with a clatter and stood there bewildered, as if wondering what to do next.

"Haden't you better go to bed?" She got up in her nightgown and picked up the bottle, not wanting a chance of broken glass.

"Yeah, I guess so." No longer clever, his hands fumbled at the buttons on his shirt and then dropped to his sides. He went over to her bed and fell on it, lying there staring at her as if he had never seen her before.

"You're right," she said, "you'll never make it into that top bunk. Here, let's get you undressed."

She was unbuttoning his shirt when he grasped her hand in his. "You have no idea why I'm so torn up, have you?"

"Well, he was your friend." She went on getting his shirt off. "I hadn't the faintest notion that you really thought he was going to be all right."

"Haven't you ever wanted something so much that you could just about convince yourself it was so? Even when you were a kid?"

She undid his belt and he obligingly lifted his behind so she could slide off his pants. "Yes, I used to do that," she

replied in a strange voice as she thought of how she had wished that Carlos would stop being afraid to love her. "It doesn't do any good."

"It doesn't, does it?" He paused. "Do you know why he was my friend?" She decided to leave his underpants on, and put his legs under the covers. She started to get up to climb into the upper bunk, but he took her arm again. "No, don't go just yet. It's not all that late, is it?"

Well, let him talk himself out. "No," she answered patiently, "I don't know why he was your friend. You told me once he was the only one who accepted you when you were growing up. Was that it?"

"You do understand, don't you?" he said happily. "All my life I never really belonged anywhere. I was never Mexican enough for the Mexicans—not just my blue eyes, but even my name, Kilpatrick. Christ almighty, do you realize that Spanish hasn't even got the letter K in their alphabet? The kids used to follow me down the street when we were in school yelling '*Gringo! Gringo! Gringo!*'"

"What about the word *kilometro*?" She wasn't sure she wanted to hear all this. The less she knew about him, the better.

"That's a foreign word they just took over."

"Oh."

"Carlos never yelled those things," he went on. "He was a year older and a lot skinnier, but he'd tie into them right alongside me. We usually got licked, but he never hesitated."

"It's hard to think of Carlos brawling."

"Isn't it, though?" He paused for such a long time that she thought he might be going to sleep. "The thing I used to dream about was going to the United States where I'd finally belong. I can still remember lying in bed at night when I was thirteen or fourteen and making up little scenes of how it was going to be when I got up there, how

I'd be like everyone else instead of a blue-eyed freak with a name nobody could pronounce. Even after my father died, I thought of nothing else and got my mother to promise I could go to university there."

He fumbled in the pocket of his shirt hanging over the chair next to the bed and pulled out one of the long thin cigars he smoked. "This won't smell things up too much?"

Startled that drunk as he was he could still be thoughtful, she shook her head. "I'll open the door. The smoke will keep the mosquitos out."

Rearing up on one elbow, he drew on the cigar while holding the end over the kerosene lamp. A cloud of aromatic blue smoke wound lazily in the still air of the wagon. Taking the cigar from his hand, she drew on it herself. It was certainly no Havana—more pungent, biting than that, but familiar all the same. She remembered Carlos's horror when she asked for a puff of his, and smiled.

"Tastes pretty good, doesn't it?" Tom asked, apparently unsurprised by her smoking.

She nodded and blew a smoke ring, showing off. He laughed.

"Let's see, where was I? Oh yes, I was going to the States. I worked like a dog on Grandfather's *hacienda*, and I even had the old man behind me when I convinced him that I would learn all kinds of useful things up there. What he didn't know was that once I got up there I wasn't ever, ever coming back. I had enough of being the outcast, the foreigner."

"But you did come back, didn't you? Or was it like you came back tonight, because you had to?"

"Do any of us do anything except because we have to?"

"Can't you just want to?"

"I don't know. The line between 'want to' and 'have to' is pretty thin. Anyhow, that wasn't it, at least not that way." He drew on the cigar again and handed it to her. "I

was nineteen, and I don't think I've ever been so excited as when I was waiting for that train. The only way you could get to California by train from Guadalajara then was to go to Texas and then take another train west. Southern Texas is half-Mexican anyway, and I didn't notice anything there. But from the time I pulled into San Francisco, I noticed it plenty. Even on the train from Texas a few people asked me what country I was from. What I'd never thought about was that even though I could speak English very well, I had a Mexican accent. Not much, but enough."

"Oh Tom!" Ellen exclaimed, sorry for that boy who wanted something so much. "You don't have one now."

"I made good and sure of that," he said grimly, "but too late. From then on, I was nicknamed Mex. Though I lost the accent, I couldn't go to a party or meet anybody without someone sooner or later bringing up Mexico."

"Surely you could have lived that down?"

He sighed and watched the smoke curling up from the cigar. "Yes, I could have. After a time everyone would have forgotten. What I couldn't forget was that I found I was two people. When you've been brought up in a place, you don't realize it, but you take on a lot of protective coloration and ideas and mores—the whole scene becomes a part of you. Maybe I was a *gringo*, but I thought like a Mexican, not like an American."

"Not now, you don't. I'm an expert and I know," Ellen couldn't help saying.

"Well, I suppose I got some of my ideas of how Americans looked at things from my father, but things like language and manners and what kind of girl you decide to bed down just for fun, all of those things the college kids took for granted, I had to think about."

"I wasn't very good at them either, Tom," she said smiling, "or I wouldn't smoke cigars."

"I guess we're both a couple of misfits, wouldn't you

say?" he said lightly. "You're the only one besides Carlos I ever felt really at ease with. That was what Carlos did for me, he accepted me. The only one who ever did. When I got back from California with all my big ideas about revolutionizing the Mexican cattle business, I thought my grandfather would have a stroke. It was Carlos who believed in me and backed me. If we'd had more time, we would have revolutionized the cattle business for sure, only a bigger revolution caught up with us."

"That must make you feel bitter, to be so close to doing something like that and have it snatched out from under you." She thought of the poor slaughtered whiteface cattle who would never improve anything now except maybe the soil their mutilated bodies fertilized.

He threw the cigar butt out the open doorway where it landed in the darkness in a shower of sparks. He looked at her then, his eyes a dark blue in the lamplight. "It's not the sorrow, Ellen, though there's plenty of that too. It's the guilt. I lay there looking down at those bastards killing Carlos, and I didn't do a goddamned thing to help him." His voice had roughened.

"You had his wife and child to think of," Ellen offered.

He laughed shakily. "How I'd like to believe that excuse. But I wasn't thinking of you or the child, either. He fought all those fights for me, and I didn't have the guts to shoot the grin off that *cabrón* that had him killed. He didn't even bother to take the cigar out of his mouth. And then I didn't follow him and kill him later, either. I didn't do a goddamned thing for Carlos after his doing everything for me for all these years. He was the only one I felt right with, the only one I loved, and I might as well have killed him myself. That's not Carlos!" he shouted, pointing at the sleeping man. "Carlos is dead and I killed him." His face was wild, agonized.

"Oh Christ, love, please just hold me. I'm so drunk and guilty and ashamed and grieving. Hold me or I'll smash to

pieces and not all the king's horses or all the king's men will ever . . ." He slid suddenly into unconsciousness, but before she blew out the light and turned to him again, she saw the tracks of tears on his sleeping face.

CHAPTER XII

When she woke, the bed was empty but she could still feel the warmth of him against her. From outside came the clanging blows of a hammer on the anvil, and she hoped he wouldn't remember what he'd said last night, knowing as she did that he would never have said it sober. All that time as he had patiently shepherded them along he had been eaten by an agonizing sense of guilt, but he had never so much as given a hint of it. At the *hacienda* she had always thought of Tom as the moving force, the leader, and Carlos for all his *macho* as the follower. Now she wondered. Yet for all his guilt he had been right not to shoot Negrito. He would now be dead and she would be like Lety and Edmundo, food for the vultures. Carlos would be dead as well. It had been Tom who had gotten them away and Tom who had found Juanita and the general to get them past Guadalajara, and Tom who had had the idea of their joining the circus. She had had the feeling all the way down the length of Lake Sayula that had the five of them been by themselves, they

might well have been relieved of their mounts, food, and valuables, and probably of their lives, too.

Once one of the piebald mares who was in season neighed as if she sensed horses not far away, though they saw no one.

After she put the kettle on the fire for the coffee, she went round the back of the wagon to find out how much breakfast she should cook. Tom was shaping a red-hot shoe for a circus mule tied to the wagon. She walked up and put her hand on the mule's neck, watching Tom work. He had on a sleeveless undershirt, and she could see the heavy muscling in his shoulders and arms flexing and bunching smoothly as he hammered the glowing metal, striking a shower of sparks with each blow. Carlos was sitting on the ground watching him, too. Evidently the sound of the hammer on the anvil and the heat and color of the fire had attracted his attention. Tom glanced up from what he was doing and looked at her, the hammer coming to rest.

"Do you feel like any breakfast, or just coffee?" she asked.

He smiled sheepishly. "I'll be hungry if you want to fix something. I've found that working up a sweat and feeding a hangover all help." He looked down again and bounced the hammer lightly on the metal surface. "I'm sorry about last night. You didn't need a drunk on top of everything else." He looked up at her again, an expression on his face she had never seen there. "I don't remember exactly how I got where I woke up this morning though I remember all too much of what I said. Anyway, thank you." His eyes were warm.

She was making *quesadillos*, fresh *tortillas* heated to melt the cheese with green chiles inside, when she heard a loud commotion behind the wagon. She ran around again to find Carlos cowering on the ground and the mule with a broken lead rope. Doroteo came running up on his short legs.

"I didn't know you were going to shoe Fracaso this morning," he panted, "or I'd have told you to bring Raúl along."

"Raúl?"

"I know, Raúl seems sullen and even simpleminded, but he's got a way with animals. He was the one who did most of César's training. I'll get him."

When Tom still looked a little puzzled, Ellen said, "That's right, you missed César's debut last night."

Tom's face lightened. "Oh no, I didn't—I was back by then. I was only about a third of the way through the mescal by that time."

"You must have downed it pretty fast then. You'd finished it by the time you got back to the wagon."

"Did I really? I ought to feel worse than I do in that case." He smiled at her. "At least I sense enough to come home."

Her eyes dropped. No complications, remember? "Breakfast in half an hour," she tossed over her shoulder as she turned away, all but running into Doroteo and Raúl. She stopped then and decided to see what they would do with the fractious mule.

"He was all right until I started to nail the shoe on," Tom explained, "and then suddenly he had a fit. If I hadn't had sense enough to drop everything and take a dive, he'd have busted something for me for sure. Is he always like this?"

"He doesn't like being shod, that's all."

Raúl was meanwhile talking to the mule soothingly. He worked his way up the broken lead rope, talking all the time in a soft voice very unlike the growl he used with people. He stroked the mule's nose and then his neck. The onlookers began to feel as mesmerized as the mule. Slowly Raúl worked his way down the mule's leg then and picked up his foot, explaining all the while that it wouldn't hurt, a few taps and he'd have brand new shoes to keep his feet from getting tender. Raúl beckoned to Tom, who

approached slowly with the light hammer, some of the flat-headed nails in his mouth, and the shoe. Raúl went on talking as Tom nailed on the shoe, and the mule only flicked an ear once to get rid of a fly.

"I'll be damned," Tom said, and put a friendly hand on Raúl's shoulder. The scowling, bear-like man flinched as if he'd been burned, and Tom hastily took his hand away. "Upsets easy, doesn't he?" he remarked lightly to cover the awkward moment.

"It's all right," Doroteo said. "He just doesn't like anyone touching him."

How sad, Ellen thought, when touch was how he communicated with the animals. Afterward she invited Raúl and Doroteo both to breakfast, but Raúl ducked his head shyly and left.

"Why is Raúl so skittish?" Tom asked Doroteo while they were eating the *quesadillos* and some peppery beans. Ellen had heard Carlos say a number of times that chile was good for *crudos*, hangovers.

"When he was still just a boy, Diaz's *rurales* police got hold of him. You understand, he was born with something missing up here," he tapped his head, "but he always had that way with animals."

"Why would they bother with a simpleminded boy?" Ellen asked.

Doroteo shrugged. "Who knows? The *rurales* were mainly nothing but bandits dressed up in uniform and paid to play policeman, and you've seen what bandits can do." He indicated Carlos. "They were bored perhaps and looking for something to amuse themselves. Animals are abused because they are supposed to have no souls and therefore no feelings, and I suppose some people might extend that to freaks and the simpleminded. I know." His tone was bitter.

"What did they do to him?"

"They started off by burning him. You should see his

back, it's a mass of scars. Then, while he was still screaming, they raped him. He was only nine years old."

"It's clear who has no soul," Ellen said. "How did Demetrio find him?"

"The boy came from Alonzo's village. At that time he wouldn't talk to anyone, not for any reason. For years he lived like a wild animal himself, but he had a host of wild things that would let him talk to them and hold them: squirrels, possums, rabbits, rats, birds—even a fox. Demetrio talked him into coming along with the Veracruz circus, and he's been with him ever since."

"And you, Doreteo?" Tom asked.

"Where else can a dwarf go but to a circus?" Doroteo asked bitterly. "Actually, I can't complain. I like Demetrio, and if this circus folds, I can always find a carnival or something."

"Almost everyone I've known since we left the *hacienda*," Ellen observed, "has had a tragedy, most of them either with the Diaz people or with the bandits. Isn't there any good side?"

"There aren't good sides and bad sides," Doroteo replied. "There are only good men and bad men. Unhappily there seem to be more bad men than good men in this world. When you think that most of Mexico is dirt poor and illiterate, it's no wonder they torture animals and simple children. They're like boys who beat butterflies with sticks; there seems to be some satisfaction in proving you're stronger than something, even if it's only a butterfly."

Ellen sighed. "The terrible thing is that no one seems to learn better and there seems no way to teach them. The same violence goes on generation after generation with the only change that men think up better ways of killing each other. When I think of now naive I was when I married Carlos, it makes me want to cry."

"Yet even on your father's ranch you castrated the

cattle and horses with no anesthetic," Tom reminded her.

"You're right, we're all brutes," she said thoughtfully. "I'm no better than the *rurales* except that I don't do it to my own kind." She remembered the *hacienda*. "Or I don't knowingly do it to my own kind," she amended.

"That's more than most of us can say," Tom said.

After the afternoon performance, Tom and Ellen decided to go into town to eat. Juanita and the general offered to see that Carlos got his supper. The yellow *primavera* trees were blooming around the plaza, and on a cement bandstand with wrought iron railings and a tin roof the town band was blasting away. Crowds milled about the central square where vendors cooked and sold all kinds of food: chicken, a tripe soup called *menudo*, barbequed pork and spareribs, sliced potatoes crisped in hot oil, special round loaves of bread that were almost like cake, *tacos* of all kinds, *tamales* rich with meat and chile sauce, great caldrons of beans, a meat and corn soup with chile called *pozole*, roast young goat with or without dippers of hot *salsa*, crisp *tostadas* with cabbage, lemon, and chopped pork, roasted peanuts, and sweets of all kinds, from candied *membrillo* and plums cooked and packed in blocks to sweet breads with garish icings and hard and soft candies of a dozen varieties.

Colored paper streamers were everywhere, and in the churchyard the fireworks makers were putting the last touches on a twenty-foot-long elaborate structure of bamboo framework to which fireworks were tied in such a way so that as one tier of them burned out another would be fused until at the very end those at the top would fire off. Later this structure they were working on would be raised until it became a *castillo*, a tower, held up by lines from the church tower. Other vendors threaded their way through the crowd selling toys, knives, magnifying glasses, combs, glass and paste jewelry—all manner of goods imaginable.

Tom and Ellen wandered down a street where handicrafts of all kinds were being sold, goods of leather from saddles to handbags, pottery, *huarache* sandals, embroidered shirts, and a variety of tinware. They munched on their goat *tacos* and gawped like any travellers. Tom had seen these small town *fiestas* before, but Ellen was enchanted.

"Oh Tom, look!" She pointed down a street where a man was leading a shambling bear between the booths toward the plaza. If anything, he looked worse than César had with his abscessed teeth: gaunt, dirty, with lustreless patchy fur and rheumy eyes. Incongruously he had a shabby red hat fastened to his head with an elastic band. "Poor thing, he doesn't look as if he's had a very good life."

"Come on," Tom said roughly. "We've got to get back for the night performance."

He just couldn't cope with any more misery, Ellen saw, and she changed the subject. He had seemed all right, far better than she had expected, that morning shoeing the horses, but as the day wore on his face began to look tired and lined. The reason she had suggested supper in town was to get him away for a while from the ever-present grim reminder that Carlos had become for him. Right now there was no more guilt or sorrow or pity that he could handle. "When will they have the firework *castillo*?"

"Probably around eleven tonight. They ordinarily would have two smaller ones, but it's the mayor's birthday as well as the *fiesta* and they're going all out on this big one."

"Oh good, we can see it then. I was afraid they'd set it off while we still had to be at the circus." She tucked her hand under his arm and they walked back to the circus field in silence.

That night the performance went extraordinarily well. It was fun playing to an overflow audience, and Demetrio

had given the mayor and his party special seats in honor of the birthday celebration. Anita did a new trick with the bareback riding, and the general shot a cigarette out of Tom's mouth. César's acts, however, were still the most popular. There was something so droll about the lion's expression that he was irresistible. As they were leaving the tent after the final parade, someone in the audience called to Demetrio asking what the lion's name was. Suddenly there began and swelled until the tent bulged with it a loud chant from the benches, "We want César, we want César!" The family outing had to be brought back to tour the parade route several times before the laughter and stamping and clapping and whistling died down.

She and Tom put Carlos to bed and set out for town again. "Are you sure you want to go?" she asked, disturbed by the weariness written on his face. "I know you've seen a lot of them, but I never could get Carlos to take me. Mexican ladies, as you know, don't go places by themselves," she added bitterly. "Tonight I can go with Juanita and the general, though. I know you're tired."

He smiled at her. "I wouldn't miss the birthday *castillo* of the mayor of Tocoalco for anything."

He took her hand and they ran like children across the dark field and into the streets of the town. They could hear the *oom-pah-pah* of the band, and soon they had to thread their way through a crowd that grew more and more dense. They dodged and pushed across the plaza toward the churchyard, but before they reached their goal they burst unexpectedly upon a cleared place. In the middle of it stood the sorry bear they had seen earlier. He was shuffling about on his hind legs supposedly dancing to the tune of a concertina played by his owner. Though the music went on, the bear slowly came to a halt and dropping on all fours lumbered over to a couple eating *tacos* and whined hungrily. Just beyond Ellen she spotted Demetrio, Alonzo, Anita, Raúl, and Doroteo, who had also come to see the *castillo*.

The bear's owner let forth a string of oaths that had to do with the bear's mother, and began to belabor the bear with a club. The bear whimpered and in a pathetically human gesture covered his head with his front paws, cowering down to the pavement. Shocked and unwilling to watch further, Ellen glanced over at the circus group. Demetrio and the others were pale and horrorstruck, but Raúl looked beside himself. What happened next came so fast that afterward Ellen couldn't quite remember just how it all came about, but before she knew it, with a roar like César's Raúl lunged forward with Alonzo and Doro-teo vainly trying to hang on to him. Somehow, though, Tom got there first and seizing the club gave the man a fearful blow across the rear end, sending him staggering into the crowd. There were shrieks and shouts as the crowd surged forward, wiping out the cleared place entirely, and Ellen realized she had lost sight of the bear, Tom, the circus people, and the owner, all of them swallowed up by a tide of human bodies like a wave washing over the rocks on a beach. She was pushed this way and that in the crush as eddies of movement swirled through the tight packed plaza. She had just caromed off a fat lady with lots of gold teeth and a three year old child she was holding up out of harm's way when she felt a steady grip on her arm. It was the doctor they'd taken Carlos to—what was his name? Oh yes, García.

"I'm going to get us out of here," he said. "Follow me."

He broke a way through the crowd in the only direction they could go, toward the churchyard. They managed to get through the gateway in the iron fence and came to a halt in the churchyard itself, which was curiously but blessedly free of all but some small boys watching several men put the very last touches on the now upright *castillo*.

"Why is no one here?" she gasped, looking around the all but empty churchyard.

"They prefer to watch from the plaza, which is raised enough to give a good view. I myself have never seen one

from this close." He turned and looked at her intently. "I'm glad I ran into you, though, and not only because you needed rescuing. I was very blunt yesterday, and I've felt since that I was wrong not to say what I thought more gently."

She suddenly saw that under the gruff exterior he presented in his office, he was a gentle man and a kind one. Why else would he treat all those people, most of whom could pay him only with some eggs or produce if they could pay him at all? "Don't be sorry," she said. "It was the only way Tom would have believed you."

"And you?"

She looked down at her hands, work roughened now, and then back up at him. "I think I knew all along. I know a little of medicine, and he seemed to me to be too injured ever to be completely healed. I hoped, of course."

"You know something of medicine?"

"I was raised by a *curandera*. We treated the people in the settlement near my father's ranch."

"I hope she was a good one. The good ones are a great help and the bad ones worse than nothing at all, like the fool that treated the old man with the ulcerated legs. Is the man you call Tom a member of your husband's family? He seemed hit very hard, harder than you."

"No, he's an old friend. He counts it his fault that Carlos was hurt, but that's not true."

"I worried about him even more than about you. How is he?"

"I'm not sure. He got very drunk last night, but he seems all right today, allowing for a hangover." She hesitated. "Dr. García, would you give me something to help him sleep? I only have laudanum, which is a painkiller, not a soporific. I think he may be at the beginning of a very bad time."

"I'm going to see the remarkable lion I've heard so much about tomorrow. I'll bring you something then."

He smiled at her. "I'd never heard that about goat's milk being accepted by a child that can't tolerate cow's milk."

"There, you see?" she smiled back. "Medical schools don't teach you everything. Any midwife worth her salt should know that, though no one around here seems to have heard of it any more than you have."

"I wish you were staying here longer—I think I could learn a lot from you."

"I thought doctors never admitted they didn't know everything," she teased.

"You know, you're a remarkable woman," he said seriously, the pressure lamps near the churchyard casting a cold white light across his face and flaring on his glasses. "I'm glad I met you."

"So there you are!" Tom slipped through the gateway and came up to them. "Hello, doctor. Thank you for taking care of her. My God, what a crowd!" The men shook hands.

"We were just talking about you," García said, to Ellen's consternation.

"Oh? Good, I hope." He looked questioningly at Ellen, who couldn't meet his eyes.

"As a matter of fact, we were worried about you," García answered easily. Ellen thought, Oh no, he's put his foot in it this time. Tom will never take this from either one of us.

Tom's face indeed hardened. "Well, you needn't be," he said shortly. "There's nothing wrong with me."

"There isn't?" the doctor went on inexorably. "Aren't you taking your friend's condition pretty hard?"

"You don't mind what you say, do you?" Tom's voice was unnaturally loud. "Of course I'm taking it hard. Wouldn't you if he were your friend and—" He broke off, and Ellen saw with surprise that his hands were shaking.

The doctor put a steadying hand on Tom's arm. "I'm sorry to have had to do it that way," he said gently, "but I

had to get you to see it yourself. If you lived here in town, we could arrange something to get you to talk it all out of your system, and you would come to feel better."

"What makes you think I'd talk to you?" Tom asked sullenly, feeling angry and somehow tricked.

"Your own sense of self-preservation. Right now you're walking around like a loaded gun looking for something to shoot. You're a danger to yourself and to everyone around you. For this lady's sake, if for no one else's, talk to someone you trust. Isn't there anyone in the circus you like and respect?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Tom replied, still sullen.

"Please, Tom," Ellen pleaded. "What about Alonzo? Or Demetrio?"

Tom shook his head stubbornly. "There's only one thing that's going to help me, and when I can, I'm going to see to it. After I get you to Manzanillo, I'm coming back to do what I should have done to begin with."

Ellen became aware that for some time she had been hearing a clatter of many hoofs on the cobbles coming nearer and nearer. Now she began to hear excited yips and yells, punctuated by shots. People tumbled into the churchyard, pushed by others around them. Right into the crowd there charged a large body of horsemen, their faces shadowed by large *sombreros* and cartridge belts crossed on their chests. They were yodelling and firing their rifles in the air, careless of where the bullets went.

"Get down!" Tom yelled, pulling them both down with him.

The horsemen lined up on the edge of the plaza, laughing and talking among themselves. Ellen knew somehow what she was going to see even before she looked. A handsome man with dashing mustaches whose left hand ended in a stump was in the middle of the group on a large bay with a blazed face. Next to him was a big

man dressed in black whose face was shadowed all but his chin, sitting on a large black horse. Next to him was a *soldadera* on a white mare with a fine head. Beside her was another man on a chestnut stallion that ducked his head and played loudly with his roller bit, a sound that could be heard clearly over the silence of the crowd and the band. The man on the bay snapped his fingers loudly, and the band struck up again.

"Tom," Ellen whispered before thinking. "It's Luz! Luz and Adiós. Oh my God, Tom, what if they see us?"

"And me without a gun," Tom said bitterly. "I'm going to go back to the wagon and get one." He stood up in spite of her efforts to hold on to him.

Just then all hell broke loose, and for a moment she thought that Manco and Negrito had opened fire along with their men. There were loud explosions, and the three of them were engulfed in a shower of sparks and embers from the bottom tier of the *castillo* as firework bombs exploded about their feet and fountains of fire of all colors slowly revolved on their elaborate bamboo wheel around the center pole. Finally the fireworks died down for a moment, leaving them crouching, stunned and half-blinded. Then a shower of colored sparks announced the beginning of the second tier, which in turn began to revolve slowly as it sprouted pinwheels of colored fire alternating with more fountains of red sparks that gushed out and bounced on the pavement around them.

This in time died down to give way to the third tier, near the top. It was made up of different colored rockets that spewed hot sparks as they propelled the wheel around and around. There were odd little cage-like boxes up on short poles not more than a foot above the wheel and its fire. All at once these burst open and out of each one flew a terrified pigeon, fluttering in panicky sweeps about the churchyard. One last cage refused to open, and they could see in the light of the rockets that a bird beat its

wings hopelessly within. Belatedly the little cage did open, but not before the bird's feathers had caught fire, and there was an involuntary groan from the crowd as, burning brightly, the bird fell in short flaming arcs to the pavement in front of them and tried vainly for several agonizing moments to become airborne again before the blaze of its own feathers killed it.

The three people hugging the church fence looked at each other, their faces white with dismay and horror. Above them, the small wheel at the very top spurted intense green fire as it revolved faster and faster and at last improbably lifted entirely from the pole and soured off over the town, dripping showers of green sparks as it went. Before them on the pavement lay the charred body of the pigeon, mercifully still at last. They stood up shakily, all thought of the horsemen behind them gone for the moment, until with shrill cries and more shots the troop of horses departed, the clattering of their galloping hoofs on the cobblestoned streets slowly dying away and then ceasing abruptly as the cobbles ended.

"Holy Mother of God," the doctor breathed. "Now I know why I've never seen a *castillo* up close before."

"Do they always have birds?" Ellen asked, sick at heart.

García shook his head. "I've never see it before—and heartily hope I never do again."

Ellen became aware that Tom was standing there dazed and silent. "Come on, Tom, let's go home," she said, taking his unresisting arm. "Thank you, doctor. We'll look for you tomorrow."

"We haven't time to be formal. Call me Antonio." He gave her a slight smile.

"All right, if you'll call me Elena. Goodnight, Antonio."

He stood watching as she led Tom through the dispersing crowd toward the field where their wagon stood. As the doctor lit a cigar, Ellen looked back once and waved

before he was lost to sight.

"What happened with the bear?" Ellen asked to get Tom's attention. He went right on walking. She shook his arm. "I said, what happened to the bear?" she persisted.

He stopped then and looked at her as if waking from a vision. "The bear? Oh, Demetrio bought him."

"Bought him? What are they going to do with the poor old thing? I hope he didn't pay much." She was glad, though, for she knew that the bear would have ended by haunting her almost as much as the burning pigeon.

"It was that or see Raúl and me both in jail. That bastard's tail end is going to be black and blue for a month."

"Tom?"

"Hmm."

"You aren't going to do anything foolish, are you?"

"What do you mean? He evaded a direct answer.

"I mean, you aren't going to go after Negrito, are you?"

"Well, I'd be kind of outnumbered, now wouldn't I?" he said reasonably.

She still wasn't satisfied. "Tom?"

"What?" There was irritation in his voice now.

"Promise?"

"Promise what?"

"That you won't try to kill Negrito."

"What if I did? You wouldn't have anything to do with it."

"No, Tom. You'd put all of us in danger, not only Carlos and me, but Juanita and the general and all of the circus people who took us in. We owe them something, you know. Juanita and the general didn't need us to get to Manzanillo; Juanita took us along for Carlos's sake. The circus people knew perfectly well we were running away from something, and they've taken us entirely on faith. Not one of them has ever asked what we're running from. Do you realize that most of them joined the circus

in the first place to get away from people like you and Carlos?"

"They won't even be involved." He was sullen again.

"Oh Tom, can't you see? Killing Negrito even if you manage it isn't going to bring back Carlos's brain, it isn't going to make Edmundo alive again. You won't be all that much better than he is. That's all you damned men think about: violence and revenge and your stinking pride!" She was so angry she was half-crying.

They stopped outside the wagon so as not to waken Carlos. Tom made an obvious effort to pull himself together and be reasonable. He took her by the shoulders as if by touching her he could somehow convince her. "Ellen, there comes a time in everyone's life when he has to decide whether he's going to fight evil or look the other way. It's no use to tell me as I know you're going to that there are a lot of others as bad or worse than Negrito—for all I know Manco is one of them. It's no use saying that with Negrito dead somebody equally vicious will take up where he left off. It's Negrito's evil I know, an evil that has blighted our lives and made half a man out of Carlos. So I'm going to do something about it. I don't know what yet, but something."

She saw the futility of arguing with him further. "At least promise that you won't try anything while we're with the circus. We can leave tomorrow if you like."

"Ellen, I can't promise anything. I've got to use any opportunity I can get, and right now getting him in town seems like a better bet than trying to chase him into the mountains. I don't even know why he's here. With any luck, no one will ever even know where the shot comes from. If I let this animal go, I won't even be the half-man Carlos is. For the first time since it all happened, I'm looking forward to a time when I can live with myself."

"Welcome to the Grand Order of Assassins," she said sarcastically. "What about innocent people who might get

between you and him? You could even hit a child. Or are you feeling so guilty about Carlos that you haven't room for piddling little guilts like killing children?"

"Ellen, be reasonable! Of course I'm not going to go around killing children. I'm not as good as the general, but I'm a good shot. Obviously I wouldn't try it unless I was sure."

"Just what do you suppose Negrito's men are going to do when you shoot him, not to mention Manco's?" Her voice hardened. "They're going to go looking, that's what they're going to do. They won't worry if someone innocent gets in their way. Once the idea that anyone in the circus had anything to do with it occurs to any one of them, they'll shoot them all. For the love of God, Tom, don't do this thing."

A vagrant warm night breeze redolent of meat, corn, and chile stirred the ends of his neckerchief as they stood there facing each other. "I can't help it, Ellen. I must."

CHAPTER XIII

When Ellen woke the next day, Tom and Carlos were already gone, and she could hear the hammer on the anvil again. Wearily she dragged herself out of bed. Ever since she had miscarried, she seemed to tire easily, and the nights never seemed long enough. Maybe one day she would go see Dr. García - Antonio. She knew from her nursing experience that women often felt tired for six months or more after having a child, but she had carried hers only five months, the birth hadn't been difficult with such a small creature to bear, and she hadn't had to nurse the child. It never occurred to her that the piling of horror on horror until she had to fear for her very survival might have sapped her strength just as it had turned Tom into an assassin.

At breakfast she could see that Tom hadn't slept well, either. He looked like a stranger, hard and yet brittle at the same time, as if a light tap would shatter him. All the king's horses and all the king's men . . . She and he sat in silence not eating very much while Juanita and the general

chattered away. Fausto was looking more fit than he probably had for twenty years. The fat was coming off him, and he was already hardened and tanned. At least someone had profited from all this.

Without a word, Tom suddenly tossed the remains of the *taco* he had been toying with to one of the stray dogs that hung around in hope of such a handout. He jammed his hat on his head and went off toward town. Ellen knew what he had in mind; it was what she would have done in his place, find out when another of Manco's visits was likely to be, and hope Negrito would still be with him. The next thing was to look for a place to shoot from. Last night they had entered and left town on the same street, and would presumably do so again. As she stoked up the fire to warm water for giving Carlos a bath, she wondered how she was going to prevent him from doing it. Fausto would help her, that was it. He had everything to lose from Tom's idiocy and not a thing to gain. Negrito meant nothing to him.

"Good morning, Elena."

She started and broke out of her reverie. "Why, good morning, Dr.—Antonio," she said. Would he help her?

The doctor was looking very debonair with his rimless glasses, straw hat, a cane, and a white suit. He was smoking a long cigar that smelled like a Havana, not one of the Mexican ones. "I came to ask you how our patient is, my dear," he said, "and to give you these." He handed over an envelope with a number of pills in it. "Does he still have designs on our friend?"

"Antonio, I'm so glad to see you! He's determined to assassinate Negrito no matter what the results are. We've got to stop him!" She found she was on the edge of tears she thought never to shed again.

"I was afraid of that. In his own way he was injured as cruelly as your husband." He thought for a moment, his fingers tapping on the cane. "Has he told you how he plans to do it?"

even need the army to wipe them out. However, as she well knew from the barricaded bridge outside Guadalajara, the exacting of *mordida* in return for passage was a very practical idea here. "So all they'd have to worry about would be rival gangs taking over?"

Antonio nodded. "Precisely. With the firepower of two bands like Negrito's and Manco's, it would take a bold interloper to think of horning in. You've got to hand it to Negrito, for an ignorant peon he's got great organizational ability."

"I wouldn't mind it so much if he were a true revolutionary, but he's nothing more than a common criminal."

"Ah yes, but his criminality was forged on the *haciendas*, so you could say that they, too, were guilty."

There it was again, the indictment of the *haciendas*. Well, she supposed that in large part they deserved it. "What do we do about Tom?"

"Your Tomás is a very determined man. I would say that the best thing to do would be to interfere in some way with his determination. I take it you tried to argue him out of it?"

"I did indeed," she answered wearily, "but he wouldn't really listen, let alone change his mind. Tom is half-Mexican, and I'm afraid his *machismo* is involved in all this. I've lived with your damned *machismo* now for more than two years, and I'm thoroughly sick of it." She looked at him defiantly.

"You needn't tell me about it, Elena. I have to fight it every day in the man who won't let his wife go to the doctor until she's dying, the man who won't have anyone treat his cut until he's got gangrene, the man who beats his wife and children—I could go on endlessly. I thought your Tomás was a *gringo* like you, but since you say he's Mexican I can understand him better. No, you wouldn't have been able to talk him out of it, you least of all."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Not exactly. He went off to town not long ago, I suppose to find out if anyone knows when Manco is coming back. I think he means to try when they're on their way in or out of town. I don't know if Negrito's still around—I can't think why he'd be here at all."

"That much I can answer now. He has control of most of the territory north of Guadalajara, and Manco has all but a chunk to the south. Negrito tried to deal with Felipe Pacheco, who's got the piece just to the south of Guadalajara, but he doesn't want to play, so he's trying to talk Manco into his scheme while dangling Pacheco's territory in front of him."

"What is he trying to do?"

"Guadalajara has three main roads out, one to Morelia to the south, one to Tepic to the west, and one to Zacatecas to the north. With enough men, you could barricade the roads plus the railroads and by enforcing a toll you could make a fortune with very little effort."

"What about the soldiers?"

"What about them? Part of the army sympathized with Diaz and part with Madero, who are both gone. Huerta is an old army man, but he's a drunk and heartily disliked. There would have to be a large number of soldiers patrolling constantly to keep the roads and railroads all open. What do you think would happen meanwhile in Guadalajara, which was a Madero stronghold, when the army is all out on the roads? No, the army will leave it alone as long as goods and supplies come through freely, *mordida* or no *mordida*."

Ellen knew that the *mordida*, literally the bite, was a way of life in Mexico. There was nothing you couldn't get with a large enough bribe: a mayor, a judge, a chief of police, even a governor. It was not difficult to imagine what would happen in the United States if a group of bandits blockaded Chicago, for instance, exacting a toll from all who entered or left the city. The police might not

even need the army to wipe them out. However, as she well knew from the barricaded bridge outside Guadalajara, the exacting of *mordida* in return for passage was a very practical idea here. "So all they'd have to worry about would be rival gangs taking over?"

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"What do you mean by that?"

"No Mexican would let a woman tell him anything, even if he didn't think what he was going to do was a good idea in the first place. However, we do have one destroyer of determination left."

"Oh? What is it?"

He smiled. "You're holding it in your hand."

"The pills? You must be joking."

"On the contrary, I'm very serious. If you could slip them into something he ate or drank, he wouldn't want to shoot anyone. He'd have a hard enough time just staying awake."

Ellen thought a moment while she watched Demetrio carry a large bloody chunk of beef over to César's cage. The lion roared and put a huge paw through the bars, batting playfully at Demetrio. Beyond César's wagon she could see Raúl working with the bear, not trying to teach him anything yet, but patting him and playing with him to gain his confidence. "Are the pills bitter? It might be hard to disguise them."

"I would say that a good hot bowl of meat and chile would disguise just about anything."

"What if he doesn't eat all of it?"

"If you put six of these in, it won't matter. Six won't hurt him even if he eats all of it, and otherwise, if he only gets the equivalent of a couple, it should be enough. Your Tomás is so delicately balanced right now, his nerves stretched so far, that it should take very little to topple him. I'll wager he hasn't been sleeping well, and with any letdown of nervous tension at all, he should keel right over."

"That doesn't solve tomorrow."

"No, but with eighteen hours of sleep or so, he may very well think differently of his project. If necessary, you can slip him another dose. I gave you twenty tablets, thinking it might take you a while to reach Colima and the next doctor."

"All right," she said at last. "I'll try it. Thank you,

Antonio."

He put a hand on her arm. "You take a couple yourself tonight. You look as if you've been through a wringer. Elena?"

She looked at him enquiringly.

He started to say something, then stopped and gave a little shrug with a wry smile. "Never mind, it doesn't matter. Take good care of your Tomás. He's a good man or this thing with his friend wouldn't have thrown him so."

"You keep calling him 'your Tomás.' He isn't *my* Tomás, he's just a friend."

"Oh? You could have fooled me." He hesitated and looked uncomfortable for the first time. "Goodbye, Elena. If you should need me for anything else, I live in the green house on Calle Degollado. There's only one green one—it's a short street."

"Goodbye, Antonio. Thank you again." Impulsively she kissed his cheek.

"Don't tempt me," he said. "I wouldn't stop with your cheek." He turned and jauntily walked off, stopping for a moment to light another cigar.

When Tom didn't return by noon, Ellen began to worry. What if he didn't come back for lunch, then what? She might not be able to find where he'd holed up in town to make his shot. Then she remembered with relief that he hadn't had a gun on him when he'd left that morning. Was it possible he'd bought one? There were performances at two, five, and eight today, so he'd have to return soon if he was going to eat and go on with Juanita; their act came early.

She and Fausto and Juanita and Carlos had just sat down to eat when she saw with a shock that he was coming back. She watched him pick his way through the circus grounds, a spare man with wide shoulders who looked deceptively slender when clothed, but who had

what she thought of as swimmer's muscles, not bunched and blocky but long and smooth. He had a characteristic way of walking, head back a little, one shoulder carried slightly higher than the other. She realized that even if she saw him walking at so great a distance she couldn't distinguish his features, she would know him by the way he moved.

Just a friend, she had told Antonio. A casual friend who had saved her life and Carlos's, delivered her aborted child, shared great danger, even slept with her. She knew how he looked when he wakened, how much sugar to put in his coffee, what kind of underwear he wore. They had argued about values and love and now hate. She knew he didn't mind snakes and scorpions, though he killed them when he had to, but he detested spiders. She knew almost as much about him as she would have a husband—or a lover.

Yet the man who came up to their fire was somebody else, a cold eyed stranger with everything burned out of him but hate. He had nothing left over now for friends, for social amenities, for anything now but his singleminded desire to kill a man. He sat down and she ladled out the spicy stew, slipping into it the powder she had made of six tablets. He toyed with the stew absently, took a bite of a hot *tortilla*. She made herself stop watching him.

"Did you find what you were looking for in town?" she asked in such a way as not to let on to Juanita and the general, who were arguing amiably over which horse had taken the *charro* championship in Guadalajara three years before.

Tom nodded.

"My dear Fausto," Juanita said, "I may just barely know one end of a horse from the other, but Diablo's owner was a *patrón* of mine. I know he won in 1910 because it was the same year as Porfirio's birthday and election and all that."

"Will it be today?" Ellen went on.

Tom nodded again.

"Well, I happen to have gone through the army with Pablo's father, and his Pilón won it that year. Diablo took it the year before, and didn't even compete in 1910."

"In town?" Ellen pursued.

Again Tom nodded.

"Isn't that curious," Juanita said sarcastically, "Eufemio and I went right from the *charreada* to a party celebrating the Independence anniversary."

"I thought you were bedding down that French whippersnapper, what was his name? That phony count who came from Mexico City?"

"When?" Ellen asked.

Tom shook his forefinger from side to side, a Mexican gesture for no.

"Louis? He went to a party I wasn't invited to. My, he was memorable," she added reminiscently.

Ellen shrugged and picked at her food, not really hungry.

"If you have a good memory," Fausto laughed. "I thought he was a fop."

"You should be such a fop," she retorted.

Tom and Ellen stared at each other across a distance as great as to the stars, he defiant and she wrenched by a sorrow too deep for tears. He put the stew aside uneaten and walked to the wagon. A few minutes later he came out carrying his rifle. Ellen felt her heart turn to stone. Clamping the gun under his arm with the muzzle cocked down toward the ground, he held a cartridge belt in his other hand. His eyes flicked over her without emotion, his mind now totally engaged in what he was about to do, and he picked his way back over the ropes and odd pieces of equipment toward the town.

"Fausto," Ellen said urgently. "We can't let Tom do what he plans. You've got to help me stop him!"

The general looked bewildered. "What's he going to do?"

"He wants to shoot Negrito. We can't let him."

"What am I supposed to do about it?" He was being suddenly stubborn.

"You could talk him out of it, I know," Ellen wheedled.

Juanita was quicker than the general to catch on. "*Díos mío*, if they catch him, we're all dead," she exclaimed.

"Exactly. Fausto, hurry! For God's sake don't lose him."

Still a little unsure, Fausto heaved himself to his feet and began walking in the direction Tom had taken.

"*Córrale!* Run!" Ellen called. "You've got to find out where he's going!"

The general began to hurry then as all of the ramifications of what Ellen had said started to go through his head, and he was soon lost to sight.

"Why didn't you say something sooner?" Juanita demanded.

"I thought I had it all taken care of. That bowl of stew," she pointed to Tom's untasted dish, "is full enough of sleeping tablets to lay him out for a week." To her surprise, the bowl was empty and a few feet away lay one of the scavenger dogs splayed out fast asleep. "I don't know if that was the pills or if he's unused to having so much to eat all at once." She laughed shakily, knowing that now it was all out of her hands. She had done whatever she could.

Juanita looked at the dish and then back at Ellen. "I think you just made a big mistake, Elena. Let's hope I'm wrong."

Everyone was already lining up for the two o'clock parade when the general returned. At Ellen's questioning look, he shook his head. "I looked everywhere and asked everyone I met. Several saw him earlier this morning, but nobody recently. He's gone to ground, and we'll just have to hope the outlaws don't show up."

Though it was impossible to hear hoofbeats on the cobbles in town even if it weren't for the noisy good

natured crowd and the music of the band, Ellen found herself listening. She could still hear in her mind the ominous clatter, growing ever louder, the night of the *castillo*. All the way through the performance, through Alonzo's tops and cutting Anita in half, through the trapeze and tightrope stunts, through the lion tamer act and the performing dogs and Juanita's solo dance and the general's shooting and the clown slapstick and the bare-back riding and the trick burro and her own horseback stunt, through all of these she watched and waited for she knew not what. The *banditos* never appeared, however, nor did Tom. At last there was the final parade, the laughter of the audience at César's costume and the family outing, and the performance was over. Demetrio announced that there would be other performances at five and eight, and the crowd began to push and shove its way out. Ellen didn't know whether to be relieved or not.

Back at the wagon, she unbridled the mare and loosened the cinch. It was hardly worth unsaddling when the next performance began in an hour.

"He didn't come back." Juanita's words were a statement, not a question.

Ellen shook her head. "Maybe they won't come today," she said hopefully.

"Don't count on it. Wouldn't you come into town for a big *fiesta* with plenty to drink and lots of people around to admire what a big *macho* bandit you are? They'll be in, you'll see." Juanita sounded bitter.

Ellen put her hand on the dancer's arm. "I'm sorry about all this, Juanita. Believe me, if there had been anything I could have done to have avoided it, I would have. I've come to care for you and Fausto a lot, and the circus people, too. I would give anything to keep Tom from this idiocy."

"It's too bad you couldn't have gotten him to go on without the circus."

"I didn't know he felt like this until yesterday. I offered

to leave with him, but he wouldn't listen by that time."

Juanita stopped her. "Listen!"

As the two women stood frozen, there came faintly on the warm wind that had just stirred the golden *primavera* trees around the plaza in town a ghost of clattering hoofs. She and Juanita looked at each other in dismay, the vision of Tom's riddled body lying sprawled in the street crossing both their minds. There was no further sound, nothing but the usual circus noises, a dog barking, two children shouting as they chased each other, a roar from César.

Silently Ellen blew up the fire and put on the water for coffee. As they were taking comfort in the hot bitter drink, the general came up to the fire. Distantly they could now hear popping sounds.

"Did you hear the gunfire?" Juanita asked him.

He nodded. "It may not mean anything. They fired their guns when they came into town last night, too. Bad news travels fast. If anyone had been shot, you can be sure somebody from town would have come running out here to tell us. Is there enough coffee left for me to have a cup?"

Ellen found his matter-of-fact manner comforting, and while he cleaned his pistols, she adjusted the mare's cinch and put on her bridle. They all walked over toward the big tent, Ellen leading the mare and Carlos coming along behind trailing on the ground a long stick he had picked up somewhere. Every once in a while he would turn around and watch with interest the track it made on the bare earth. They always took him to performances because whenever he was awake, they couldn't trust him not to wander off.

They went round to the back of the tent where the opening procession was forming up. Ellen had Juanita help her tuck her hair up under her hat, making her look like a boy in her loose blouse and leather chaps. The crowd always loved it when, as she began her run, her hat would fly off and they suddenly discovered she wasn't a boy at all but a woman with long blonde hair. Everyone

else was standing relaxed, joking and conjecturing about the crowd, checking last minute costume details. The Yaqui trapeze artists smiled at her, and even Raúl seemed in good humor. She shivered as she smiled back.

"All right!" Demetrio called. "Here we go!"

They began to file into the tent, the cymbals, horn, and drum making a brave noise. Gregorio in his clown makeup immediately broke out of the parade and went among the benches handing out paper flowers, ogling pretty girls, and asking ridiculous questions of small children who hung their heads shyly and mumbled back, embarrassed. As she entered on the mare, Ellen's eyes swept the tent, automatically looking for Tom. Instead, they fastened with dawning horror on a section of benches filled with hard-looking men wearing cartridge belts. As if drawn by a magnet, her gaze fell on Negrito himself, dressed all in black, a cigar clamped in his grinning teeth. Next to him sat Manco, laughing and calling obscene comments as the parade approached and passed him.

Where was Tom? Wildly she looked everywhere, but could see no sign of him. Had they killed him? Belatedly she became aware of another problem. With Negrito she recognized several men who had been at Santa Cruz, and realized that they might well recognize her as well. She thought one of them looked at her with a slightly puzzled expression as if trying to figure out why she seemed familiar. She blessed the ploy of trying to look like a boy until after her act began, but knew that if they saw her hair and remembered the day she had done this same trick in front of Carlos and his friends, they would know immediately who she was.

She looked around for Carlos and found him still trailing the stick and ambling along behind the general and Juanita. She was sure that he at least was unrecognizable with his long mustaches, unshaven chin, shaggy hair, and peon's clothes. Nowhere could she see the faintest resemblance to Don Carlos Luis Cristiano Alejandro

Alvarez Escobar y Mendoza, *Señor* of the Hacienda La Purísima Concepción de Nuestra Senora de Santa Cruz de las Flores, in this shabby Mexican trailing his stick with simpleminded pleasure through the sawdust and dung of a small travelling circus. She couldn't help sighing.

After the procession she went to Demetrio and told him the mare seemed to have gone a little lame, that she'd better not go on this time. She would, she said, take the horse back to the wagon and pack her leg in cloths dipped in hot water. Demetrio, about to go in to announce the first act, nodded hurriedly and disappeared inside. Ellen tethered the mare by the wagon and came back to the tent, finding a spot just inside where she was all but invisible herself yet could see Manco and Negrito. Both men had women with them and both already seemed fairly far gone in their cups. They yelled happily at the performers, and Manco even drew his gun when César jumped on Demetrio in the lion taming act. When the lion licked Demetrio and everyone laughed, Manco grinned sheepishly and put his gun away as Negrito clapped him on the shoulder and howled with glee. Act after act came on, and Ellen dared to think that Tom had had sense enough to plan his ambush for the outskirts of town where at least no one else would get hurt. Barring Tom's capture, there was no reason to connect the killing with the circus. She looked around from time to time at the rest of the audience and was surprised to discover expressions of fear and hate on some faces as they watched the rowdy outlaws. Manco was obviously far from being popular with everyone.

It was during the grand finale parade culminating with César's family outing that there came twice the sound that Ellen had almost stopped dreading. Two flat cracks of a rifle sounded even above the laughter and the band music. Manco toppled sideways with a red streak down the side of his head nearest Negrito, who dived under the bench he was sitting on. Manco's woman leaned over toward him

just in time to catch the second shot in the throat and fall on top of him. Screams, cries, and groans resounded in the tent, and there was a stampede for the main entrance, people pushing and trampling each other in their frantic haste to get out.

They had reason, for after only a small pause, more shots rang out as the two groups of outlaws separated and began shooting at each other. Just as Ellen was about to slip out the back before the shooting became wilder, she saw César give an almost comical look of dismay and flop awkwardly out of the cart, a spreading red stain on the polka dot dress. Rooted now to the spot, she saw as if in slow motion Demetrio run to the animal and take his big shaggy head in his lap as Doroteo stood helplessly by in his little boy shorts. César's long pink tongue came out for a last lick of Demetrio's arm before a great gout of blood gushed from his mouth staining Demetrio's arm and white britches both an obscene bright red. The lion's head fell back and was still. Tears ran unheeded down Demetrio's white shocked face as he cradled César's great head in his arms.

Ellen turned away, heartsick, and slowly made her way toward the wagon, unheeding of the sound of shots behind her that became fewer and fewer and at last stopped entirely. She slumped down on a stool and sat staring into the still-warm ashes of the fire she had made the coffee on all those years ago. She hadn't moved when the general and Alonzo came hurrying across the field carrying Carlos upright between them, his feet dragging on the ground, making a twin track in place of the single one that had pleased him so earlier when he dragged the stick in the dirt.

"I don't think I can stand any more, Fausto," she said calmly to the general. "I can't take any more."

He patted her awkwardly on the shoulder. "There, there, he isn't all that bad, it's only a shoulder wound. His

collar bone might be broken, but that's all. He'll be fine, you'll see."

Ellen looked at Alonzo. "Tell Demetrio I'm so sorry—about César, about everything." Alonzo shuffled his feet uncomfortably and Ellen wondered how much Fausto had told him. "I'm going to pack and go, tell him, and also that I'm sorry we didn't leave earlier. None of this would have happened then. Can you and Fausto help me with the heavy things? The circus can have the forge and anvil."

"Oh no, they can't," Tom said, coming out from behind the wagon. "I've already got both of them hauled in."

Ellen looked at him with empty eyes. "You murderer," was all she said.

He made a gesture of impatience, and picking up Carlos in his arms, staggered with him to the wagon door, which Alonzo leaped to open. "One of them recognized me," Tom said. "We've got to get out of here."

"What about Carlos?" Fausto demanded.

"Well, what about him? It's only a matter of time before they come hunting, and unless you want him tortured and Ellen raped, he'll have to take his chances. The wound doesn't look too bad to me, I don't even know why he's unconscious."

This was a Tom Ellen had never seen, grim, cold, callous. With Fausto's help he lifted Carlos into the wagon. Ellen brought the two mules and hitched them up. "You can have the other mule, Fausto," Tom said, "to pull along with your horse."

"Take the mare, Ellen," Fausto said. "Juanita hates to ride, and I can buy her a dozen horses in Colima. Get along with you now, and I'll cover your retreat in case anyone has the idea of trying to follow you. Goodbye and godspeed, my dear. When you get to Colima, wait for us if you can."

He nodded briefly at Tom, who had mounted his already saddled horse, and they pulled out of the field,

skirted the town on a dirt farm road, and set off on the highway outside of town. Still numbed by the violence she had witnessed, she drove the mules while the still saddled mare, hitched to the back of the wagon, followed. Tom rode behind, holding his rifle in one hand and looking back from time to time. It was shortly after seven, and dark was falling rapidly. Ellen wondered briefly how she was going to tell him that she didn't want to see or speak to him again, then decided wearily that such dramatics belonged in another world of people who didn't kill each other, who didn't hurt and torture and maim. If she was going to get Carlos to Manzanillo, she needed Tom's help, and she felt no qualms about using him now.

It seemed as if they had been travelling for hours when Tom finally came up beside the wagon. "I can see a dirt track branching off up there," he said. "Let's take it and see if we can't hide the wagon and rest for a bit. If we're followed, they ought to go right by."

In the light of the almost full moon the track was easy to discern as it wound off up a slope and into the shadow of some pine trees. Behind, Tom got off his horse and erased the wagon tracks with a small tree branch. The shadows swallowed them up, and suddenly they were in a darkness dappled by splashes of moonlight filtering through the pine trees. A cool aromatic odor of pine resin surrounded them, and for the first time Ellen had a feeling of safety. After travelling for some twenty minutes, they turned off up an unmarked open slope and entered the shadow of more trees.

While she unhitched the mules, Tom went back on foot and carefully lifted the grass on the open slope that had been crushed in two telltale lines by the wagon wheels.

"Do you think a small fire would be all right?" she asked. "I want to heat some water to clean up Carlos's shoulder and see what really happened to him."

Tom didn't answer, but started to gather up fallen

branches until he had a wall of them on the side of the wagon toward the road. They lit a tiny fire which nevertheless burned hot with pine resin, and before long steam could be seen rising from the surface of the water she was heating. Carlos lay face down on the bottom bunk, apparently asleep. They turned him over gently, and Ellen winced at the bloodstained hole in his shoulder. They peeled off his shirt, having to wet it with warm water to free it where the material had dried into the blood of the wound. Already there was an angry blue-black bruising around the bullet hole. Tom felt in back.

"It never came through. We'll have to get the bullet out."

"With what?" Ellen asked practically. "I have some forceps, but they were never made for extracting bullets."

"I may just have to cut it out with a knife."

"Tom, listen to me. The bullet's got to come out and the wound cleaned properly. We haven't the instruments, we've got to get him to a doctor."

Tom looked up at her in the lamplight. His face still bore the hard look he'd had ever since that terrible clatter of hoofs the night of the *castillo*, his eyes like blue stones. "What do you suggest? The next town of any size, and there's nothing to say they have a doctor, is Ataxco, and it's at least fifty kilometers away. We sure can't go back to Tocoalco."

They stared at each other over Carlos's still form. It wasn't natural for him to be sleeping like this, and Ellen suddenly thought to examine him for other wounds though there was no sign of blood. They stripped him, and she noticed that he had lost weight. Those delicate yet strong bones, beautifully articulated, that always slid so smoothly under the unblemished skin now looked knobby and awkward, the joints seeming unnaturally large with so little flesh to cover them. It was almost as if he had shrunk into the physical role of his bygone world.

and they were tending a starving child.

"But what," Tom said in a thoughtful voice, "would be wrong with bringing the doctor to him, since he can't go to the doctor?" Ellen knew that he was wrung by Carlos's appearance just as she was.

"You mean go back to Tocoalco for Antonio?"

"Exactly."

"Tom, you can't. I won't let you." In case he misconstrued her intent and thought she had forgotten that their new precarious exile was all his suicidal doing, she added, "I can't see any way I could bring Carlos to safety without your help."

"What use to bring him to safety if he's going to die? No, I'll go, and the sooner the better. Did Antonio tell you by any chance where he lived?" He put a slight scornful emphasis on Antonio's name as if he disapproved of her using it.

He stood up, and she realized for the first time that he was no taller than Carlos. He had always seemed to her physically so much bigger. Because of his broad shoulders there was a hint of ranginess in his build that promised height, and his whole stance was that of a larger man.

"All right," she said wearily, "do as you please—you will anyway. He lives in the only green house on Degollado. If you don't come back, I'll have to go myself and take him with me." At his look, she went on, "Don't worry, I'll shoot him and myself both before I let them have us."

He touched her shoulder briefly and went out into the moon-speckled darkness. She was dressing Carlos again in warmer clothes when she heard his horse's hoofs, muffled by the pine needles, head out of the trees and down the moon-drenched slope below.

CHAPTER XIV

She was lying fully clothed on her bed when she heard the double sound of the hoofs of two horses. She knew she hadn't slept long, not nearly long enough for Tom to have gotten to Tocoalco and back, and it belatedly occurred to her weary mind that this wasn't Tom. She stumbled about trying to find the pistol, and at last held its cold metal grip in her hand. She stepped to the door, meaning to slip out and try to hide away from the wagon while covering it with her gun. Surprise would be the only hope of saving them. At the door, she immediately saw that the riders were too close upon her for that, and she determined to throw open the door and start shooting. Just a couple of lucky shots would incapacitate these pursuers enough to finish them off.

Her hand was on the door and she was only waiting for them to get near enough to make her shots count, when a low voice stopped her. "Ellen? It's me, Tom. I've got the doctor."

Trembling with reaction, she opened the door, still holding the pistol in her hand.

"*Diós mío*," came Antonio's voice, she would have shot us both!"

"You know, I believe she would at that," Tom said calmly, not even his amusement softening his features much. She knew he must be deathly tired.

"How did you get back so fast? I knew you couldn't have gotten to Tocoalco, and I thought you must be someone else."

"He wasn't in Tocoalco," Tom said.

"You see, Elena, they brought to me the woman of Manco who was wounded by the assassin." He refrained from looking at Tom. "Manco himself wasn't hurt that much, only a crease, worse luck, but his woman was shot through the throat. I could have done something about that, but the bullet left from the back of her neck after destroying nervous structures that one can't do without. I have no idea why she was still alive. I took her into the dispensary and told all of them they must leave, that they could wait outside. Of course they had no way of knowing just how mortal her injury was. Then I left by the back door with my instrument bag, threw some things in saddle bags at the house, and left town as fast as my mare would go. I hoped it would be an hour or so before they would presume to break down the door, and I was apparently right."

"Why didn't you tell them she was dying? Surely then they'd have seen it wasn't your fault."

"In the ancient world, Elena, bearers of ill tidings to kings were often put to death themselves. Manco, who feels little but hate for everyone and everybody, surprisingly became obsessed with this woman. What physical wiles she used hardly bear thinking about, but the fact remains that Manco is like an ancient Aztec emperor, and those tidings I would have borne were very ill indeed. In

truth, she stopped breathing soon after I got her into the inner office." He shrugged. "Was there even a choice?"

"But all those poor people who wait in your office, what of them? Doesn't it bother you to have left them?"

"I'm only a romantic when it comes to love. I was in Tocoalco for a year, more or less, and I had my share of luck. Sooner or later I would have misdiagnosed something or lost a patient that the local *curandero* said he could have saved, and my useful time there would have been up."

"If you feel like that, why did you come to begin with?"

He smiled as he separated out the contents of his doctor's bag on a blanket. "An unhappy love affair, what else? I thought I might as well be doing something useful while I was sulking, and I was curious as to what could be accomplished in a rural town. What doctors there are in Mexico are all in the large cities." He was putting bottles to one side and instruments to the other. "*Híjole*, what a mess! On my way out of the office I crammed whatever I could in the bag."

Tom came back from seeing to the animals, and brought more wood for the fire.

"We'll need boiling water and plenty of it," Ellen said, "so we'll have to take a chance on a larger fire."

"I wish I'd thought to buy a kerosene stove in Tocoalco," Tom said, "but it was warm at night and I thought we'd be in Manzanillo long before we'd need any heat in the wagon."

Antonio stood up. He had put what he needed in his bag and stuffed the rest back into one of the saddle bags. "All right, let's see what we have here."

Carlos was still sleeping flat on his back as she had left him, his chest only barely seeming to rise and fall with his breathing. Antonio went to work in a quiet, deliberate way, asking Ellen's help now and then to undress him and turn him from side to side. Carlos made no move, nor did

he waken. The doctor looked up finally, frowning.

"I can find only the shoulder wound, and yet he acts as if he's in a coma. Would there have been any way he could have hit his head again?"

"I don't think so," Ellen replied. "Alonzo and the general carried him to the wagon, and he was upright then."

"Could he have hit his head when he fell?"

She shrugged. "I doubt it because he always sat by a tent pole during the performance. I didn't see him hit, I don't think anyone did. Those of us who weren't under something were watching César."

"What about César?" Tom demanded.

Ellen shook her head, suddenly unable to speak without crying.

Antonio helped her out. "The lion was shot, and he died."

"Oh my God!" Tom exclaimed. "How could that have happened?"

"Hard to say. There were two shots from somewhere, creasing Manco and killing his woman. Then the two bandit gangs began shooting at each other—without much result, I might add. Most of the shots went through the top of the tent. It's pretty hard to aim very well when you're shooting from under a bench, but it was still a miracle no one was hurt except this man and a small boy who got his arm broken in the rush to get out. I had him outside and was splinting it when Manco commandeered me to save his woman."

"Where were you?" Ellen asked Tom, her voice hostile.

"They came into town from a different direction, and I missed them. I went after them like a fool, forgetting they might have left a rear guard. Worse luck, one of them recognized me, and I had to lead them quite a chase before I got away. I came back to the circus by a roundabout route."

"We know all about what you did then," Ellen said bitterly, handing Antonio a scalpel. "You don't need to tell us."

Tom started to say something, but just then Carlos groaned as Antonio gently began to scrape and pick out the cloth fibers from the wound with scalpel and forceps. "That's the trouble with bullet wounds," he observed, "the bullet takes in cloth and dirt, forming hundreds of potential pockets of infection." Carlos groaned again but did not stir. "I don't like that," Antonio went on. "I don't want to give him ether when he's already unconscious, but if he can feel enough to groan, he should be thrashing around. You say he never regained consciousness?"

Ellen shook her head. "Not to my knowledge. Of course he might have while we were driving the wagon here, but there was no sign of the bedclothes being disturbed."

At a gesture from Antonio, Tom held the lamp higher. "Could he be in some sort of shock?"

"Maybe, but it shouldn't last this long, especially for a wound like this where no vital functions have been interfered with, no lung puncture, no fractures. If you have to be shot, this is the way to do it: a spent bullet angled between the shoulder bones and the collar bone, coming to rest before it could shatter the shoulder blade in back. I'm beginning to wonder if this isn't some kind of further mental withdrawal. You said he'd regressed pretty much into childhood memories; perhaps the shock and hurt of being shot pushed him even further. We know so little about either the brain or the mind that the best physicians in the world can give little more than a guess. I've seen men with holes in their heads so large that a metal plate had to be fastened on to protect the brain, and they had hardly so much as a headache. Then you get a slightly depressed fracture like these here, and the brain is damaged beyond repair."

At last he worked his way down to the bullet, bringing the bloody lump out clamped in the narrow forceps and putting it on the towel along with the shreds of cloth and thread he had already removed. Then he reached in once more and brought out the largest piece of cloth yet.

"I hope I got it all," Antonio said finally. "If I'd been able to do this right away before the swelling, it would have been much easier." He poured a liquid that smelled strongly of carbolic into the wound. "Now there is nothing to do but wait and see."

"When can he be moved?" Tom asked.

"He shouldn't be moved at all for several days at least."

Tom shook his head. "We can't wait that long. Tomorrow we'll have to find water, no easy matter, and if it's too far to carry, we'll have to move the wagon. Not only that, but this is very much too close to the road."

"Three or four miles on the dirt track down there will get you within reach of a spring that flows all year round," Antonio said. "I know this part of the country well." He grinned. "The first month I was in Tocoalco, I used to sit in the office all day waiting for patients who never came. I got sick of that and took up butterfly hunting to pass the time. I never killed and mounted them, but I used to catch them and let them go. That was when I found the spring up there, and my very first patient as well. He'd been thrown by his horse down there on the road and broke his arm and collarbone. Gradually I had to give up chasing butterflies then. Anyway, if this man must be moved, better to get it over with and let him settle down. Some peace and quiet, and his mind should improve."

He bound a pad tightly to the wounded shoulder and gently let Carlos lie down flat again. The wounded man's face was pale and his breathing shallow. It was decided to let Antonio ride with him while Ellen drove and Tom led the riderless horses. They cleaned up the camp, burying the fire under several layers of dirt which they covered with pine needles.

"I'll come back tomorrow morning and remove the last traces," Tom said. "It's impossible in the dark to tell what we've left behind."

The jouncing trip was made in less than two hours, though to Ellen in her weariness it seemed to take a year. She tried to ease mules and wagon over the rougher places, but slow as she would go, there would be a jarring thud as the wheels dropped off a high rut or fell into a small gulley made by running water during the rainy season. Toward the end, she didn't even try to pull up the mules since the result seemed to be the same in any event. She supposed that if the shaking were too severe, Antonio would say something. She actually thought she was dreaming when she first heard the tinkle and swish of water up ahead. The mules perked their ears, and one of the horses ahead actually whinnied. She let the mules drink while Tom let the lead ropes fall and got off his tired horse. He lay on his stomach and put his face in the water. Soon all three of them and the animals besides were having a long drink of the fresh water that tasted slightly metallic, as if it had been stored in underground tanks.

She tried to get Carlos to take some, but it just ran out of the side of his mouth. Antonio shook his head, puzzled. When Tom came in, he suggested that Antonio take his bunk so that he could watch Carlos, while he would take a bedroll and sleep under the wagon. He asked hopefully if Ellen wanted a fire to cook anything on.

"Man, can't you see she's finished?" Antonio snapped. "Let her go to bed—you're perfectly capable of getting your own food. Anyway, isn't that jerky I see hanging there?"

Much to her surprise, Tom docilely did as he was told, though as he took down the jerky he muttered something about her being as strong as a horse.

"You damned fool, it was you yourself told me she'd had a miscarriage of a five month baby not much more than a month back. And all she's done since is ride a

couple of hundred kilometers horseback, nurse her husband, perform a riding trick every day that would scare an Indian, and I'll bet you saw to it she did all the cooking and washing, too, didn't you?"

Tom looked at him with his mouth open, too dumbfounded to say a word. Ellen, drunk with being tired, giggled.

"*Madre de Diós*, I thought it was only Mexicans who treated their women that way. I keep forgetting though, you're Mexican at that."

"Well, she didn't say she was tired," Tom said defensively, scowling like a boy caught stealing apples. It was the first time since the *castillo* that Ellen had seen him look human.

"Why the hell would you have to wait for her to say it? Even though I'm Mexican myself, I swear I can't think why nearly every male in Mexico puts his wife somewhere between his horse and his dog. He even treats his goats better. For being part *gringo*, you're pretty stupid."

"I'm not a *gringo*," Tom flashed back. "I'm as Mexican as you are. My mother is Doña Alejandra Alarcon Cedillo, and I was raised on a *hacienda* outside Mexico City. Do I sound like a *gringo*?"

"The worse for you," Antonio retorted. "Your father should have had sense enough to take you to the United States before you were ruined instead of letting you be raised in this godforsaken country of *machismo* and murdering thieves." His dark eyes behind the clear lenses were angry.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" Ellen pleaded. "I *am* tired, thank you Antonio, but so I think are both of you. If you'll get out of here for a moment until I can get into bed, I'd be very grateful. And Tom," she added sweetly, "you know where all the food is, so if you're hungry for heaven's sake cook something. In that pot over there is the stew we had at noon, it needs only to be heated, and in

that cloth are some *tortillas*. Moisten them a little and heat them, they should be fine. You know where the coffee is."

She sat on the edge of the bed yawning while Tom sulkily gathered up the things and took them outside. She was too tired even to be hungry, but realized that he hadn't eaten at lunchtime, or perhaps all of this would never have happened. She didn't even remember later getting undressed and climbing into bed. Faintly she was aware of someone standing by her bed, then not even of that. She dreamed that night of the flaming red pointsettias in front of the house at Santa Cruz. Tom was ordering Odón to cut them all down because they reminded him of blood, and she was pleading with him to save them. Then Tom kissed her, but his lips became a pointsettia blossom dripping blood, and the dream ended.

When she woke, she knew it was late, for there was a splash of sun across the curtains on the window Tom had made for her. There were no sounds at all, and she wondered if both men were off hunting or cleaning up where they had first stopped. The top bunk was empty, but Carlos lay much as he had ever since being put on the bed. He seemed to have shrunk even more, and his nose and cheekbones stood out, making him look very Indian. She had a feeling of foreboding about him now that she had not had before. Up until the bullet wound, she had been horrified at the change in him, but it never occurred to her that he might die. Pale and gaunt, he looked half dead this morning already.

Ellen got up, dressing slowly, and went outside. A little breeze was sighing through the pines, and the smell of the needles added to a wisp of smoke from a small fire combined into an aromatic odor that made her sniff with pleasure. With a start she realized that Tom was still under the wagon, and she peered at him to be sure he wasn't sick. He was lying on his back, arms crossed on his

chest under the blanket. A shadow of beard smudged his cheeks and chin where there was no mustache, and yet he looked very young, the lines on his face smoothed out, the hard blue eyes covered by pale lids with a fringe of black lashes. His wide mouth twitched slightly, and she wondered what he was dreaming about behind that still face; she hoped at least not of poinsettia blooms like fresh blood.

She was drinking coffee and heating the stew when Antonio returned. He got down from his bay mare with a sigh, unsaddled her, and came to join Ellen at the fire. They were camped on a short flattened place under the trees a quarter of a mile above the track. She could still feel the lurch of the wagon as the mules struggled with it up that last steep slope slippery with pine needles.

"At least we're far enough away that you can't see the smoke in the daytime," he said. "We'll have to be careful at night, though. I cleared up down below and erased our tracks with a pine branch I could drag from the horse. I doubt they'll be looking for us up here anyway, it's quite a bit south of their home range." He might have been talking about a herd of dangerous wild animals whose habitat he had studied.

As they companionably dunked the last of the *tortillas* in the hot stew, she really looked at him for the first time. His eyes behind the concealing lenses were actually a light brown, almost amber. The skin across his jaws were pitted, she noticed, possibly from smallpox, though up on his cheekbones and across his forehead it was a smooth, light olive. His nose was hooked at the bridge as if it might have been broken once, lending his face a toughness belied by his tender mouth and delicate lips, not quite hidden by the jaunty mustache. It was a sensitive face, humorous and a little sad at the same time, a face that made you want to make it laugh.

"Tom seems to be sleeping a long time," she said. "He

must have been dead tired after his exertions at the circus." Her tone was bitter.

"You keep referring to his activities at the circus with a very acid tone of voice. Was he perhaps, ah, tripping the light fantastic with the lady dancer? I must say, she had a remarkable presence."

"No," Ellen replied unhappily. "Or rather, yes he was, but I wish that were all. He was the one who started the shootout, and he was so terrible a shot he didn't even hit what he was aiming for. Because of his insane obsession with revenge, he killed César, hurt Carlos again, killed Manco's woman, and drove you out of town."

If he noticed putting César before Carlos, he said nothing about it. He put a hand on her arm. "I'm sorry, Elena. I know what he meant to you, that was why I didn't try harder."

"If you know what he meant to me, it's more than I know. He could be so understanding, and then turn around and do things that infuriated me. There was nothing that could have come of it, though. Can you imagine my making love to anyone while my brain-damaged husband lay there haunting me? I'm so tired all the time now that I don't even care. I'm so weary of the constant killing and running that all I want to do is sleep and be left alone."

Antonio's look sharpened. "You aren't still bleeding, are you? Since the miscarriage?"

She shook her head. "No, that stopped a long time ago. I guess I'm just heartsick." She changed the subject. "How long do you suppose we'll have to stay here?"

He shrugged. "It depends on your husband. Right now he looks as if he's given up, as if he's lost even the last little interest in living his head injury left him. When I saw him in the office, he had no grasp of recent reality, but he was fascinated with his past. Now he's retreated even beyond that, as if he had somehow managed to return to the

womb. With any kind of luck the shoulder wound should heal with no problem, but—" He broke off abruptly. "Sorry, I get carried away sometimes and think out loud."

"No, tell me. But what?"

He looked at her intently, measuring, calculating. "—but he's dying and there's no reason for it."

"Should we try to get him up? Maybe if he sees something besides the inside of the wagon, smells the pine needles and wood smoke, feels the warmth of the sun, he'll rally."

"Perhaps this afternoon if it's warm. It goes against any medical practice I ever heard of, but you could have a point."

"Would you do me a great favor, Antonio?"

"Of course, whatever you wish."

"Stay here so I can take a ride by myself today? It seems years since I was ever just alone by myself. I'll only be gone a couple of hours."

"Are you sure that's a good idea? I don't like to think of what would happen if you met someone. Whoever is up here is probably up to no good. The people of Tocoalco don't even like to come to these mountains anymore except in large parties for wood. They're afraid of Manco's men, and with reason."

"I don't care. I won't go far, Antonio, I promise, but I've got to have some time alone."

"If you must, you must. Can you shoot?"

She nodded.

"I might have known." He grinned. "Take a gun. Even if you don't get to use it on outlaws, you might come across a deer. I'd like to make a good strong broth for Carlos, and we're all but out of meat."

She nodded again and went to get the mare. They had strung ropes to the trees around a small grassy clearing to form a sort of corral, and the horses were hobbled besides. A hobbled animal could sometimes travel for miles, and

they couldn't afford to have to go that far looking for them. While she was there, she watered all the animals and had a drink herself, delighting in the multitude of ferns and delicate green plants growing out of the moist banks. After the heat and dusty hardpan of the valley below, these rich slopes dotted with pines and blessed with the gurgling stream seemed a paradise indeed.

Later, as she rode through sun and shadow of the pines, the rifle in the saddle scabbard by her leg, she thought how nice it would be to stay here forever. They had water, and these hills should abound with game of all kinds. They could wait out the revolution here, and she would never have to expose the damaged Carlos to the outside world. The circus folk had taken him for granted, they were used to oddness; but what would her father think, or the Mortons? That is, provided her father would take her back. Until now, she had really thought no further than Manzanillo, which seemed to be some sort of Holy Grail for all of them: the circus, Antonio, Carlos, and herself, even Tom. She had gathered that Carlos had some sort of funds in the United States, and if the worst came to the worst and her father didn't relent, she supposed she could buy a small house somewhere for the two of them. The bleak prospect of Carlos and her caged with each other for the rest of their lives made her shiver, and for the first time she looked hard at the future and knew real fear.

She hadn't been paying much attention to her surroundings outside of an automatic marking mentally of landmarks that all people familiar with wild country do, so it was difficult to say who was the more startled, she or the spike buck that came out of the undergrowth nearby. The mare let out a snort and shied as Ellen snatched the rifle from the scabbard and snapped off a shot at the fleeing deer that surprisingly fell but then struggled to its feet to go on. She shot him again, more carefully this time,

and he gave a great bound and collapsed in an awkward heap. His eyes were already filming over by the time she got off the excited mare and came up to him. She took out her knife and started to gut and skin him, separating the heart and liver from the other entrails.

The mare snorted again and whinnied. Ellen picked up the rifle, levered a new cartridge into the chamber, and stepped behind a tree. There was the unmistakable sound of a galloping horse, and she swung her rifle around as Tom's riderless gelding burst into the clearing.

Behind her, a voice made her jump a foot. "Are you all right, Ellen?"

She turned and found herself face to face with Tom, who had his rifle in his hand, too. His horse had meanwhile trotted up to the mare and nuzzled her before starting to crop grass. "You scared the life out of me!" she said accusingly. "I thought you were Manco or Negrito or somebody like that."

His eyes, hot and wild when she had first seen him, turned to ice. "It isn't your fault I'm not. What the hell are you doing, firing shots like that? They could be heard for miles."

"Antonio said we were almost out of meat, and he needed to make a broth for Carlos. This spike buck nearly ran over me, so I shot him."

"Of all the damned fool things to do..." He shook his head disgustedly. "For God's sake let's get him loaded on your horse and get out of here before we have every bandit in this part of Mexico helping us."

In silence they lifted the gutted deer carcass onto the mare and tied it down. Then Ellen swung up behind Tom and they led the other horse back toward camp. She was furious with him, first for frightening her and then for bawling her out like some wayward child. He'd be as glad as the rest of them when it came to eating it, she thought rebelliously. She was even angrier when his horse shied

suddenly at a bird's flight and she was forced to put her hands on his waist to hang on. Above his belt she could feel his skin warm through his shirt. She snatched her fingers away as if they'd been burnt.

When they reached the wagon, Antonio put his head out. "You got a deer, good! Build up the fire and start some venison boiling for broth. I'm changing his dressings."

Ellen was already standing on the ground, and as she looked up at Tom's face she could see his mouth tighten. Don't do it, Tom, she begged silently. What's done is done, and the three of us have to live together for a time. There's not a Mexican male alive who'll put up with what you're about to tell him. Please don't say it. For Carlos's sake, don't.

Tom's icy stare turned to her, and he must have seen something in her face because instead of saying anything he got off the horse and began to unsaddle him. Together they heaved the dead deer off the mare, and Ellen went back to skinning it while Tom built a fire and put the horses away. After a time, Antonio came out and knelt watching her.

"You certainly seem to know what you're about," he observed admiringly as she deftly quartered the animal and was cutting steaks from the loin, using a heavy machete to chop through the bone.

"I ought to, the number of hunting trips I've been on," she answered, setting the steaks aside and breaking the fine leg bones over a rock with one of Tom's blacksmith hammers. "There, we'll split these and boil them for a couple of hours along with some shoulder meat for the soup. Cool, it should set like gelatin. How's Carlos?"

Antonio shrugged. "The same, I guess." They swung the pot on a tripod of green boughs, half-filled it with water from the stream, and put in the pieces of split leg bone with the meat still on them and some extra meat

from other parts. Ellen put in onions and garlic and a half-handful of salt. "Meanwhile, who's interested in venison steak? I'm hungry enough to eat a horse." They built another fire for the steaks and *tortillas*, and she heated up the beans from the day before. She and Antonio kept up an animated conversation, but Tom sat brooding, eating his food almost absentmindedly.

"The most beautiful place I ever saw," Antonio was saying, "was a great wild canyon east of Navajoa you could only get into by packing in on burros or mules. Indians who have only seen an occasional hunter and who don't speak even a word of Spanish live at the bottom. The Indian name of the canyon is all but unpronounceable. Marvellous steep rock walls that seem almost to lean in over you, fertile virgin land at the bottom, and every turn of the trail providing another breathtaking view. I'll never forget it. If we were there now, I'd be tempted never to leave."

"I think almost everyone has a natural paradise to bring to the mind's eye," Ellen said, "when you need comfort or escape. When I was growing up, it was a valley on the way to the Hurricane Deck country that in the spring was carpeted solidly with vermillion poppies and blue lupin, the edges of the valley disappearing into a solid forest of pines. Later on, though" and here her eyes flicked to Tom, "it came to be a small cove on the coast of California near my father's ranch. The waves break along a shallow reef that runs out from the beach, so flat and wide you can walk along the top of it. In the still water near the beach are schools of little silver fish that flash like lights along the surface of the blue water. I sometimes think that all my life I'll be homesick for that one small cove."

"And you, Tomás?" Antonio asked. "Isn't there a place where you would spend the rest of your life if you could?"

Tom, whose blue eyes had been fastened thoughtfully

on Ellen, shook his head. "There's nowhere I belong," he said. "I can think of a hundred places beautiful enough to make you want to cry, but I'm always a stranger there."

"What about your mother's *hacienda*?" Ellen asked. "Where you grew up?"

"It wasn't my mother's *hacienda*, it was my mother's family's *hacienda*, there's a big difference. It was to be divided between my two uncles whenever the old man, my grandfather, died. He's probably dead now of apoplexy—his land is right in the middle of Zapata territory. It's hard to imagine a place Zapata would rather raid, though the armed guard my grandfather trained kept him away at least up until a month ago."

"You don't sound very fond of your grandfather."

"I'm not. He's everything that's been wrong with Mexico: autocratic, dictatorial even with his family, a stiff-necked *macho* old son of a bitch. He treated my grandmother like a peon, especially because he was angry that she bore him only two living sons, the measure of his manhood. The four that died as children he didn't count. He paid his workers in credit with the *hacienda* store that charged exorbitant prices, and they were beaten for the slightest misdemeanor."

"Since you grew up there, it's a wonder you didn't learn to do as he did."

"No it isn't, I hated him. One day I saw him having a man beaten to death. He had a cigar in his mouth just like that bastard Negrito when he clubbed down Carlos. I was only ten years old, and I swore then I'd never be like him."

"Is that why you were so determined to kill Negrito?" Ellen asked. "Don't you suppose he's a victim of the very system you despise?"

"I could make excuses for my grandfather, too, and probably for the devil himself if I set my mind to it. No, Ellen, it won't do. Evil is evil, and it's got to be destroyed."

"So far, it's everyone else who's been destroyed," she

remarked dryly. "I can't make you see it, can I? Because of Negrito I lost my child and worse than lost my husband, but I can see nothing gained by becoming a murderer as he is."

"You're a woman," he said shortly. "Women see things differently."

"Oh?" she asked with dangerous meekness. "I'd forgotten that we women aren't supposed to be capable of the baser emotions. I could seek revenge as well as any man, maybe better, but my father and Rosa both taught me that two wrongs don't make a right."

"I didn't say you couldn't feel," Tom snapped. "I said that you saw things differently."

"What he means is," Antonio broke in, "that women are practical and that it is men who are the romantics." He cut off a chunk of steak with his clasp knife and chewed on it.

"Before you go off hunting Negrito," Ellen said sarcastically to Tom, "do you suppose that this afternoon you and Antonio could go down to where the mesquites still grow and bring up some wood to smoke the venison? Pine burns too fast by itself."

The afternoon passed quickly. Ellen managed it so that the broth making was also a stew making. Heated to a boil every day and provided with occasional fresh onions, such a stew would last indefinitely. She set aside more steaks for that night, and proceeded to cut the rest of the meat into strips half an inch wide and a foot long. Meanwhile the men brought two mule loads of mesquite wood from a dead tree they found and a pile of green branches as well. They pounded in pine stakes touching each other in the shape of a square some three feet across. They built a fire in the bottom of mixed dry and green wood and hung the strips of venison over long green mesquite boughs laid across the top of the pine structure. Four more lengths of thick branches were laid along all four

sides to hold the branch roof up off the meat. When the afternoon breeze that dissipated the smoke dropped, the light was already failing and the column of smoke seemed to thin and lose itself in the darkening sky as soon as it cleared the tops of the trees.

Antonio and Ellen between them managed to sit Carlos upright and spoon the broth to the back of his throat where involuntary muscles performed the swallowing actions that took it to his stomach. His color grew better and he half opened his eyes while muttering unintelligibly. The second time they tried, several hours later, his eating was voluntary, though he couldn't or wouldn't hold the spoon.

"It looks as if he's improving, doesn't it?" she asked Antonio hopefully as she changed the pad they had put under his hips. He seemed so light to lift that it was as if, she thought, his bones were hollow, like a bird's. She never stopped to analyze her strong urge to have him live at all costs, but hovering around the edges of that urge were guilt and fear and above all anxiety about what Tom would do if he died. She had no illusions as to how many qualms he would have about deserting them to go off seeking his mindless vengeance.

"Do you then really want him so much to live?" Antonio asked, peering at her closely through his rimless spectacles.

"Of course I do!" she replied in false indignation. "Is that the kind of question Mexican doctors ask?"

"It's the kind of question *this* Mexican doctor asks," Antonio said reasonably. "I am, strangely enough, thinking not only of your welfare, but of his, too. Would you want to be as he is; unable even to perform the most basic bodily functions without help, or would you rather be dead? Would you wish to be this kind of a burden on him, to chain him to a woman already dead and deny him children and love and pride?"

She looked at him fearfully. "What are you suggesting?" she whispered.

"I'm suggesting nothing." He stopped, and then laughed shortly. "You think I'm saying we should kill him? Never, Elena. I'm too much doctor for that. I'm trying to get you to drop this guilt you seem to have. If he dies now, you'll start thinking of all the things you should have done for him, and you'll blame yourself. I've seen it happen before. He may not die now, but his chances of living a long life are very poor. Nature has a way of taking care of cripples. If you haven't already, you'll soon begin to wish he were dead—you'd be less than human if you didn't. Don't flay yourself for it, Elena. It's a natural, honest reaction."

"I think I can deal with that, Antonio—what is worrying me now is Tom." At the look that flicked briefly across his face, she put her hand on his. "No, I'm not in love with him; I could never forgive him for what he did at the circus. On the other hand, I owe him a lot: my life, Carlos's, maybe even the general's and Juanita's. If Carlos dies, his guilt, so much larger than mine, will make him go off and get himself killed by somebody not fit to clean his boots. Killing and killing and killing, that's all you men know!"

"Don't include me in that, Elena," Antonio said sharply. "That's why I became a doctor, to try and save people, not to murder them."

They sat there staring at Carlos, who had begun to toss restlessly now and mutter all the time. Antonio gave him a sleeping draught and they now went outside, thankful though neither would admit it to leave the wagon behind for a time. They ate supper in silence, each wrapped in his own thoughts. When it came time to say goodnight, Tom surprised her by kissing her briefly on the mouth. He ran a finger down the side of her face. "It will come right in the end, Ellen, you'll see."

Sometime in the night she started up from a dreadful dream of pursuit and flight from she knew not what. She could hear a wind sighing through the pine boughs, but nothing else. It was still very dark, and she went back to sleep. She woke the next time to hear Carlos groaning. Antonio was doing something to his shoulder.

"What happened? What's wrong?" she demanded.

"I'm afraid it's infected," he said, sounding really worried for the first time. "I'm going to put some water on to boil."

She dressed hurriedly and went out into the fresh-smelling early light. When the water was boiling, he dropped some instruments in it and stood a pair of small tongs up against the inside of the pan. Again she held the light while he fished instruments out, let them cool until he could use them, and after cutting away the bandage began to work on the bruised shoulder with its round, puss-filled bullet hole like an obscene pursed mouth. The flesh around the wound was swollen, and angry red streaks radiated outward from the crusted yellow hole. On an impulse, she put her hand on Carlos's forehead to find it burning hot. It reminded her of Edmundo and his typhus.

Antonio cleaned and drained the wound as best he could, but didn't look very happy when he'd finished. "That's as much as I can do now. See those streaks? They mean he's got, if not actual gangrene, at least blood poisoning of some kind. I thought maybe out here in the clean forest instead of in a hospital he might escape, but God alone knows what was on that shirt that was driven through his shoulder by the bullet. If it were his arm, I could amputate, but with his shoulder I can't bloody well do anything." He sounded angry.

"You mean we'll just have to wait and see what happens?"

"That's exactly what I mean. If this infection means to

take him, I hope it takes him fast. I've seen them suffer for weeks sometimes, riddled with abscesses and too weak to scream."

It wasn't until hours later that she saw Tom was gone and a good part of the venison jerky with him. He'd gone even before he knew there was anything wrong with Carlos; probably her waking in the dark was due to some noise as he was leaving. Now Antonio was the only one she had left. She knew Tom would die just as she was sure Carlos would die as well. To lose the one she had to lose the other. Antonio found her later rocking back and forth with her face in her hands. He pulled her to him and stroked her hair, still in a loose braid down her back as she had slept with it.

"He had to go, Elena. He's that kind of man, just as I'm another kind of man. If anyone could make it where he's going and come back alive, I think he can."

She pulled back and dried her eyes. "I'm not weeping for him, Antonio, I'm weeping for myself." She managed a weak smile. "That seems to be always what I have left: myself."

"No, Elena—you have me. I love you, you know."

"Antonio, my dear, what would I have done without you? Why can't I feel when I want to feel? Horror piles on horror, and I'm like a burnt-out campfire, nothing but cold ashes left."

He rose with a sigh. "I passed that a long time ago, and you will, too. I'm sorry, Elena. Protestations of love over the body of a husband who may be dying are in poor taste to say the least. Think of it as an aberration brought on by circumstances." He pulled her to her feet. "Come on, my girl, we have a lot of work to do."

They made a pallet for Carlos outside and laid him down dressed only in a loincloth. At regular intervals they bathed him with cool water, trying to keep his fever within bounds. The frail cage of his ribs rose up sharply from his

shrunken stomach, his whole wasted body a constant brutal reminder of the marvellous smooth-muscled machine that she used to love watching while he was asleep on mornings after their making love. Constantly they tried to get him to take water, broth, any liquid at all, often only a spoonful at a time before it began running out the side of his mouth.

Already exhausted when this new ordeal began, she moved as if in a dream. Superimposed on the reality of Carlos slipping so slowly but so inexorably from their grasp, the firelight playing on his gaunt body and glittering from the lenses of Antonio's glasses, were visions of another life that might as well have been on a distant planet. She and Rosa were walking down the dusty road toward the settlement at Las Cruces. She was ten and racing Billy Morton on his quarterhorse gelding Domino; she was five and riding on the saddle in front of her father on Tigre; she was eleven and they were hunting rats in the hay barn with bailing wire flails; she was fourteen and winning the hackamore class at Santa Maria on Sally's mother Dulce, and always and always there was the ocean, sunlight filtering through the translucent green of a rising wave, the froth just beginning to curl along the upper edge. She held Carlos's wasted hand and wondered if she would ever see the ocean again.

Day and night all but merged in her mind as she went through motions as automatic as breathing: checking on the horses and mules, cooking up the jerky in everlasting stews with onions and garlic, bathing Carlos, coaxing him to swallow just one more sip, going in to sleep fully clothed only to start up wide awake a few hours later confused with weariness, guilt, and the obsession that only her presence kept Carlos alive. She and Antonio never talked now except in snatches forced by practicality. He was almost as tired as she, and she wondered if he were suffering his own guilt, sure that something, he

should have done would have avoided the blood poisoning. Three days, four days, five days, she never knew later just how long it all went on. A week? More?

Though without will, Carlos's body was surprisingly tough. The chills that shook him, making them wrap him in blankets and build up the fire despite their fear of discovery, and the fever that burned him up until she wondered that the water they put on him did not turn to steam, would have killed a weaker man long since. Some inner flame of vitality beneath the parchment skin refused to be finally quenched, and sputtered on and on. Neither of them would leave him at all now, unwilling that, should the end arrive or a turning of the tide toward life miraculously occur, they would not be there to see it. Carlos was no longer a person to either of them, but simply a physical entity that by its very existence drove them to the ends of their endurance.

It was early morning, just light enough to begin the sky's turning from the pearly translucence following dark to the endless bright blue of a clear April day that would be hot outside the shade of the pines. As in a trance, Ellen sat dully watching the broken patch of lightening sky she could see through the branches of the trees. She suddenly felt Carlos's hand tighten on hers, and she looked at him to find that his eyes were open for the first time, not only open but actually looking at her with recognition. Why, he's going to live after all! she thought, surprised.

His tongue ran across his dry, cracked lips, and then he smiled. "Ah, Rapunzel," he whispered, "light the lamps, *querida*, it's getting dark." His other hand lifted briefly toward her and fell across his chest. "I'm so thirsty."

As she watched helpless, she saw the light in his eyes darken even as he spoke until they were nothing more than lifeless stones half hidden by his drooping eyelids.

Antonio beside her let out his breath in a long sigh.

"He's gone." He pressed the eyelids closed with his fingers, and then they stared at each other wordlessly, unwilling to believe that it was all over, that all of their care and their efforts had come at last to nothing.

CHAPTER XV

"Elena, for heaven's sake come with me to Manzanillo." It was a week later, and they were once again having this interminable argument over leaving. After they had buried Carlos and rested for several days, Antonio wanted to go on to the coast, but he wouldn't leave unless Ellen left, too. She in turn refused to leave until Tom returned.

"But he could be dead," Antonio pointed out cruelly. "How would we ever know? Do you mean to spend the rest of your life here?"

"All right, just another week, and if there's no word from him, we'll go. You could have gone any time you wished, you know. There's no need to stay here for my sake. The wild animals certainly won't harm me, and if Manco's people were to come, you could do nothing for me anyway."

"There are times when I can understand all too well how you must have exasperated your husband," Antonio said in irritation. "You know perfectly well I can't go off and leave you. What would happen if you hurt yourself?"

"I'm quite capable of taking care of myself," Ellen replied loftily. "Please don't pull any of those *macho* judgements about helpless females on me. If you're going to go, go, but I'd appreciate it if you're going to stay that you stop this eternal nagging. I'm not going for another week and that's that."

One day when out hunting they met a burro train loaded with wood from the higher timber. They talked to the man with the lead donkey, a little wizened fellow with peon's clothes and a squint.

"The circus left the day after the shooting." He shook his head and grinned reminiscently. "I'll never see the like again. A shame that big lion had to go and get himself killed, he was a rare one, all right."

It turned out he lived in a tiny village at the foot of the mountains some ten miles from Tocoalco, and the doctor was obviously unfamiliar to him. The outlaws had all ridden off and hadn't been seen since. No, he didn't know if they had all gone together. When the shooting had started, he had been forced by sheer weight of the crowd to remain long enough to see César die, but as soon as he got clear of the tent, he'd headed his burro for home as hard as he could go. No, he'd not seen a man with blue eyes, in fact had never seen a man with blue eyes except his *compadre* Luis's grandfather who was blind and whose eyes were the cloudy blue of milk after the cream had all been taken out. No, he knew nothing of what had been going on in the rest of Mexico. He'd heard that one *presidente* had been thrown out and another killed, but didn't know if the rumors were true or not. His village, named Tlalaxac, was Indian not Mexican, and they wanted only to be left alone. They made a good living selling charcoal in Tocoalco and other towns, but otherwise they wanted nothing to do with Mexicans. He was a charcoal seller and could speak Spanish, but many of the people in his village spoke only their own Indian lan-

guage, an offshoot of Tarascan. Antonio gave him one of the last of his cigars, and with a grin and a friendly wave he was off down the track, the eight burros following along, some loaded with wood and some with charcoal.

"Why don't they live up in the timber?" Ellen asked, puzzled as to why they would haul the wood all that way.

"First of all because they've always lived there. A long time ago their village was probably surrounded by timber. Second, it gets really cold up in the timber in winter. April and May are the two hottest months in the uplands, remember."

They had luck that day and came upon a herd of wild pigs, managing to shoot two of them before the animals disappeared with startling rapidity. Unlike their domestic cousins, these wild ones could move with lightning speed. Once again they put their structure for smoking meat to use, making jerky of the one pig and roasting the other whole on a spit over the pine fire, continually burning fresh wood around the edges of the fire and then pushing the glowing coals under the pig. While they were waiting for the pig to be done, they each had a couple of cups of mescal and water. Unused to alcohol now, they grew very silly, laughing too much over the most clumsy attempts at humor. When their dinner was ready, they lifted the half-grown pig from the spit and put it on a plank, where Ellen carved it. Alternating sips of mescal with bites of succulent juicy meat, they ate until they could hold no more, replete at last with something other than the venison jerky.

Their chins still shiny with fat from the meat, they drank coffee laced with more mescal and proposed absurd toasts. "To the mother of this delicious piglet, long may she grunt through the woods and eat only the tenderest of tasty sprouts. And to her offspring as well, for never was there manna from the very heavens that tasted as good as this."

He sobered. "Elena, I not only love you, I want you, and never so much as now." Slowly and deliberately he took off his glasses, making him look younger and curiously vulnerable. He reached for her.

She was unresisting. If it meant so much to him, why not? He had been loyal and steadfast beyond friendship, and she owed him much. As she felt his mouth warm and as yet only gently insistent on hers, she heard the unmistakable snick of the bolt on a rifle and jerked away. They both swung around to see Manco, his features clearly outlined in the firelight, impassively sitting on his horse watching them. Alongside him were half a dozen other men, also silently looking on. Wait a minute, wasn't that Adiós, Carlos's stallion? But she had seen him last with Negrito's band. She peered at his rider and with a dawning dismay even beyond the clutch of fear, made out the features she had come to know better than her own, the blue eyes regarding her dispassionately, showing no faintest sign of recognition. He might have been cast in bronze.

She stood up and faced them all defiantly. They were strong enough to take her, but she would make them work for it. Beside her, Antonio calmly lit a cigar.

"Well, gentlemen?"

"I thought you had departed our country for good, doctor." Manco gave a show of teeth that was more a grimace than a smile. "You were foolish indeed not to have done so."

"I was enjoying a vacation in the mountain air, Manco. Did you think I wouldn't find your company irresistible? After all, we've had this appointment for a long while now, haven't we?" Antonio drew on his cigar, the end flaring red.

Manco grunted. "It's better sport to break a brave man at that. Who is she?" indicating Ellen.

"Oh, she's just a woman I picked up from the circus," Antonio said casually. He grinned then. "Like most ladies

of her kind, a lively lay, but I was tiring of her. I'm afraid that even before you gentlemen turned up, our idyll was pretty well over."

"It didn't look like it," Manco said suspiciously.

"My dear sir, had it not been all but over, you would surely have found us in a far more compromising position than that, I assure you."

"What's in your wagon?"

"*Her* wagon," Antonio corrected him. "Nothing but a few bunks and some blacksmithing equipment. The fellow she was living with before used to shoe horses and repair tools, I understand."

"Is that right, Tomás?" Manco suddenly asked the man on the chestnut stallion.

Tom nodded, his face enigmatic.

"What happened to this fellow?"

Tom shrugged. "After the shooting, we all scattered. Who knows where he went? Probably with the circus, I imagine."

Ellen felt sick. For whatever reason, Tom had apparently led them here. It was her fault and her fault alone that she and Antonio were not at the outskirts of Colima by now. And all because of some stupid feeling of loyalty she'd had. She should have known that his insane search for revenge would lead him to betray anyone or anything if that betrayal would lead him closer to Negrito. That he had been close indeed was borne out by his having *Adiós*. And yet, and yet... Could this really be the same man who had stood there at the sulphur pool with the moonlight falling like a mantle across his shoulders playing the gallant who would not betray his wounded lord? Wasn't a betrayal of her also a betrayal of Carlos? He had no way of knowing that Carlos was dead.

"No, that's not right," she said clearly. "He wasn't just a fellow I was living with, he was my husband."

Manco and Tom and Antonio all three looked at her in

surprise, as if they had forgotten she existed.

"He was shot in the *fracaso* at the circus," she went on. "He died of blood poisoning almost two weeks ago." She was watching Tom closely as she said this, and had the satisfaction of seeing him stare at her for a moment in disbelief, then close his eyes briefly and take a long breath. What did he expect when he had led these animals straight here? What sport did he think they would have with Carlos, had he still been alive?

"So," Manco said to Antonio, "you're still murdering your patients, are you?" He turned to one of the men. "Get their horses and bring the mules, too." So he had found their animals.

"I'll bring the wagon in," Tom volunteered, his voice sounding hoarse.

"Too bad I don't like *gringas*," Manco said as they all rode off to an upper trail that Ellen didn't even know existed. "I had one once and she brought me only bad luck." He held up the arm with the stump at the end.

"They cut off your hand for a *gringa*?" Ellen asked, surprised.

He nodded. "She was visiting the *hacienda* and took a fancy to me, though I was ten years or more younger than she. She told me she would accuse me of rape if I didn't make love to her." He gave a wolfish smile. "Not that it was so hard to do at that. She had a nice body. Of course we were discovered. They sent her away and cut off my hand." He looked deliberately at the stump. "It was God telling me to have no more to do with *gringas*." He looked at her appraisingly. "I'm sure my men won't all have the same scruples, and I doubt you have many, taking up with your man's murderer, and him hardly cold yet."

For the first time she realized how it must have seemed to all of them, Tom included; that she was nothing but a heartless bitch in heat. Even the several months that Carlos had really been dead to her didn't seem like much,

the difference of course lying in their relationship beforehand. It was stubbornness and their child in her belly that had kept her from leaving him when he was going off to his fancy ladies in Guadalajara. Yet she knew she would have turned to him willingly and eagerly in the night had he chosen to come to her. She wondered if they would give her to one of them or gamble for her or take her all at once and leave her like poor Lety to crawl off and die, if she could even crawl then.

They rode for several hours through the pines as dusk turned to dark, at times galloping in a foolhardy way over the slippery needles on steep slopes. Manco was like all the others, she thought scornfully. He didn't know the first thing about real horsemanship, which included taking care of the animal in addition to just riding him. At last they turned straight up, rode through a cleft in a high rock ridge, and came out in a little valley where there were tents set up, a couple of covered wagons, and a small herd of horses. She could see women as well as men in the camp, but was under no illusion as to how much protection they would be.

They rode yipping into camp, and one of the men tossed the remains of the cooked pig at the women around the campfire with many coarse jokes about pigs for pigs and the like. Antonio put a comforting hand on her arm. He surprised her thoroughly by saying in a low voice in good English, "We'll get out of this somehow. No matter what I tell you to do, do it without question." He squeezed her arm and smiled reassuringly, then rode off as his escort, a villainous looking fellow with a great scar across his face jabbed him with his rifle.

Ellen refused anything to eat and sat watching the scene in camp. The women all wore long skirts and looked at her curiously as she sat there in a pair of Carlos's pants she had taken to wearing for practicality. Of the men, some were obvious toughs like the scar-faced one who had led Antonio off. Others, however, were little more

than boys hardly old enough to shave. They swaggered about in front of her like bantam roosters anxious to show off their plumage. She noted one in particular who had strange pale eyes like silver coins that made her shiver, though he couldn't have been more than seventeen.

At last Tom came into the circle of firelight and accepted a plate of food. He made a joking remark to the woman who served him and slapped her across the bottom, eliciting a peal of raucous laughter. He had left the wagon and mules on the other side of the cleft until morning because it was a tricky passage through the narrow rocky gap with a wagon. Seemingly at least, he ate with good enough appetite, and she wondered at his new hardness. This not only wasn't the man of the sulphur pool, it wasn't the man who had begged her to hold him for comfort, either. He looked gaunt, and she realized he had shaved off his mustache. Dear God, she thought, what would it take to make her finally kill the last spark of concern she had for him? Incapable any longer of love, she still seemed able to worry about what was happening to him.

Manco strolled up then, and Tom looked at him questioningly. "What are you going to do with them?" he asked, and took another spoonful of beans from the pot, to which he added a piece of roast pork.

"Tomorrow is time enough for the good doctor," Manco replied. "I want to be able to see every shade of his expression. As for her, what do you suggest?"

Tom looked thoughtful. "If you let all of them at her, you'll just have a dead woman on your hands, and we have few enough live ones as it is. Why don't you let us gamble for her? When whoever gets her tires of her, he can pass her on. Meanwhile you'll get some work out of her."

Manco clapped him on the back. "Well said! No time like the present, ey?"

Sensing some sport, the men had all gathered round.

"What'll it be?" Manco asked at large, "cards or dice?"

"Dice," the scar-faced man said, "but not his," indicating Tom.

"All right," Tom said evenly, "we'll use yours. You're still sore about my winning the stud, aren't you?"

"I don't think those dice were honest," Scar-Face said stubbornly.

"Look out, friend," Tom warned. "Are you calling me a crook?"

Scar-Face stared at him for a moment, but his eyes shifted first. "We'll see," he muttered darkly and turned away.

Tom must be out of his mind, either that or hated her. Did her seeming betrayal of Carlos mean so much to him then? He couldn't expect to win with someone else's dice, after all. Did he care so little for her? Another part of her mind said reasonably, He had no choice. This way he stands a chance of winning—that is, if he even agreed to play.

"No one asked me," she spoke up to Manco, "but as long as that *cabrón* doesn't win, I don't care." She pointed at Tom.

"Oh?" asked Manco, interested. "Why?"

"He hated my husband, and he was always trying to force his attentions on me. If you ask me, I think he may have shot my husband himself." She spat in Tom's direction. "Now that one's cute," she said coyly, indicating the youth with the pale eyes.

Manco laughed, delighted. "So you're a lady killer now, eh, Gallo? I guess Rooster is a better nickname than we thought when we gave it to you."

Scar-Face scowled at the boy, who was visibly preening himself. "Never mind, boy, we're not using any dice of yours, either. She'll be happy when she gets a real man."

Several bottles had begun to circulate, and Ellen,

whose tipsiness had begun to evaporate with the snick of the rifle bolt, took drinks when they were offered her. In the unlikely event that it was Tom who won, the thought of his touching her was hateful. It was due to him that they were in this capricious monster's power, in fact due to him that Carlos had died in agony, that they weren't still on their way with the circus to Manzanillo.

"Bring the *medico*!" someone shouted. "We have to see that he too enjoys this game for the favors of his beloved."

Someone else built up the fire until it lit the whole valley. She saw them bring Antonio, who looked at her helplessly, his face firmly set in a mask of stoicism. The play began, taking a long time to go through the twelve men who put themselves in the running. The others drank and shouted insults at them, laughing uproariously at the expense of the disappointed players who were eliminated on the first round.

"Why aren't they all playing?" she asked Manco.

He laughed unpleasantly. "You flatter yourself, slut. Those others already have women, and they don't think you're worth losing the one they have for the one they may never gain. If they were all going to assault you, it would have been different—they could have done that and kept their women besides. To throw the dice, on the other hand, means that the gambler wishes you at least for the time being as his woman."

There were six, then five, then four, then three left. Every time Tom threw, her heart was in her throat, though he joked and laughed with the others as if it didn't really matter that much to him, and perhaps it didn't matter, she thought. Then as she knew it would be, the boy with the silver eyes was eliminated, and it was between Tom and Scar-Face. In order to drag out the suspense, they decided to make it three of five. Each one would throw until he either made his point or crapped out with a seven. Each point made would count one toward

the three. Ellen felt light-headed from the drinking and just wished she could go to bed somewhere alone and sleep for a week.

Scar-Face leered at her and threw a seven right away, giving him one point. Tom leered in his turn, throwing a double six, and because of the importance of the occasion, was allowed to try for it again. He made four throws and came up with a seven. One point to Scar-Face, none for Tom. The second round for Scar-Face; he threw an eight, and after three tries made it again. Tom took the dice and threw a five. For five agonizing throws he managed to avoid a seven and finally made his point. Two for Scar-Face, one for Tom. This meant that Scar-Face's next turn could decide the whole game. He threw, and one die came up six while the other die turned crazily on end and finally fell over to show a two. On the next throw, the first die settled at four and the other flashed a three. There was a sigh of let out breaths and groans from some who had put money on Scar-Face.

Tom took up the dice and shook them hard in the cup. The first die showed a five, and after wobbling a bit, the second one came up two. He looked at her and grinned. "Not long now," he said in Spanish. "You'd better be feeling as hot later as you were with the doc here."

She turned away, a look of disgust on her face. "You'll have to take me by force," she said lamely.

"We'll see," Tom said cheerfully. "How is she, doc? A hot number?"

Antonio laughed. "Too hot for you, my friend."

Meanwhile Scar-Face was shaking the dice. He made a six and after two tries made his point. Now it hinged on Tom's next throw. He threw a four, a bad point. His next was an eight, followed by a ten, a three, and finally a four. Scar-Face made six again, then crapped out with a seven. Another groan went up. Tom made a five but after three throws crapped out himself. This time it was his followers

who groaned. Scar-Face threw an eight, a six, a twelve, and then a seven. Ellen breathed a sigh of relief, and yawned nervously. Tom looked at her and a strange expression flickered across his face. His mouth tightened, and he threw. A five and a two!

Amid the confusion and babble of voices as the men paid off their bets, Antonio managed to get to her and press a piece of paper into her hand. "Remember what I told you," he murmured in her ear. "I love you." He was gone then, dragged away between two men. Scar-Face gave a roar and came at Tom with a knife. He had been drinking heavily during the game, and the prospect of having come so close only to lose was more than he could stand. Tom dodged and pulled his own knife.

The two men circled each other warily, the knives seeming to lie in the palms of their hands. Tom was the quicker of the two, but the gorilla-like Scar-Face had the longer reach. First Scar-Face drew blood, a long shallow gash along Tom's forearm, then Tom came in low and made a deep cut across the other man's leg.

"Enough!" Manco stepped between them. "I don't want to lose either one of you." He turned to Tom. "Take your woman, Guero, and hurry up about it. No one will bother you."

Tom had a bemused expression on his face, but he turned and walked toward Ellen, who made a play of shrinking away from him. Two of the women held her while calling ribald challenges at Tom, who grabbed her none too gently and walked her toward a distant tent.

"Keep fighting me," he said in a low urgent voice. "They've got to believe you're going to be raped."

She twisted half out of his grasp and raked her nails down his face. As the angry red weals appeared on his face, he gave a loud curse and slapped her so hard on the side of the head he made her ears ring. There was a chorus of laughter from behind them and some choice sugges-

tions as to how to tame her. She felt she had done enough and stumbled along to the tent as if she were only half-conscious from the blow.

Inside the tent he lit a kerosene lamp and turned to face her. "Get undressed!"

She hesitated, and ripped off her shirt. "You needn't be so damned realistic."

"I'm only half acting," he said grimly. "Climbing into bed with that four-eyed *cabrón* when Carlos was dying—I could kill you for that. I'm surprised you waited until I was gone."

She slapped his face. "That's for deserting us! It took him a week to die, inch by inch, and we nursed him day and night, just like Edmundo. Where were you, you holier-than-thou? Going haring off after your blasted revenge, that's where! You and your revenge killed Carlos, do you know that? I'm so sick of you I never want to see you again. I hope you enjoy it tomorrow when they torture Antonio, it was you who brought them to us."

Tom had been looking at her stonily. "You little fool, it was your smoke that brought them to you. You made a column of smoke two miles high that looked like a baby forest fire. Of course they came to you."

"Ah, but we wouldn't have been there if we hadn't been waiting for you to come back."

A look of astonishment crossed his face. "You were waiting for me?"

"Why else would we have still been there?" she retorted. "Antonio wanted to leave right after Carlos died, but I wouldn't go. He didn't feel he could go off and leave me, so there we were like sitting ducks when you and your friends showed up."

"You seemed to be enjoying yourself well enough."

"Tom, I'm very fond of Antonio, and I might even have ended by bedding down with him—I could do worse. I see death all around me, perhaps my death as well, and I want

to live while I'm alive. I want some simple human warmth and comfort and affection, is that so hard to understand? I want someone to care if I live or die, is that so bad? You've taken your bedding-down whenever you've wanted it—I'll bet you bedded some of the women here—so why hate me for not being faithful to a husband who's been as good as dead for months? You only cared for Carlos, never for me, or you wouldn't have walked out. I can't say I think much of how you cared for him, either. Your revenge didn't give him water when he was thirsty, it didn't cool him when he was burning up, it didn't make him less alone when he was dying. You're the last one to have any right to judge!"

The anger went out of his eyes then, but she couldn't tell what he was thinking as he looked at her. A noise made him turn his head, listening to something outside. "Get the rest of your clothes off. Hurry!" He began unbuttoning his shirt.

She realized that their possible escape and even their lives could depend on how well they could fool Manco, so she stripped naked without any argument. She stood there while he finished undressing, feeling cold and more than a little foolish.

"All right, now we're going to struggle to please our public," he said, and put his arms around her, kissing her brutally.

She pushed against his chest and tried to break away, but his arms were unyielding. He put a leg around behind her and tripped her, neatly pushing her over on one of the familiar bedrolls they had used until they got the wagon. That's right, he would have taken it with him when he went off looking for Negrito. He lay down on top of her, lean as he was, still heavier than Carlos.

"Scream!" he hissed.

She let out a piercing shriek, and they rolled around a bit on the bedroll. He reached over and turned down the

wick until the lamp went out. She heard snickering on the other side of the tent wall. All at once right by her ear a gun went off, making her start violently.

"That first one I aimed high," Tom called. "The next couple are going to be lots lower. *Ándele!*"

She heard running footsteps fading away toward the dim light of the huge bonfire, and she screamed once more for effect. She could see Tom's face quite clearly. He was looking at her silently, and she became very aware of his weight and warmth on her. Slowly he put down the gun and kissed her again, his mouth searching and tender this time. She started to respond, a lick of flame shooting through her, but with an effort of will she pushed him off.

"You make me feel like a whore," she said bitterly.

Ellen could see that he grinned. "Whores aren't supposed to enjoy themselves."

She wriggled out from under him. "Was it worth it to go off and leave us to do all the nursing?"

"If you'll remember, when I left it looked as if he was getting better," he said mildly, lighting a cigar. She couldn't help feeling irritated that he wasn't angry at her rejection of him. "It took me the better part of a week, starting at Tocoalco, to find Manco."

"I thought it was Negrito you were after." She pulled up the blanket and was happy for the warmth of his body. They must have climbed two or three thousand feet from their old camp.

"I had to find Manco in order to find Negrito, unless Negrito had already gone home. When I found them, it was too late."

"Too late?"

"Negrito wasn't quite dead yet, but almost. For all that time Manco had been toying with him in many imaginative ways. I guess he really missed his woman at that."

"How did you get *Adiós?*"

"Negrito wasn't the only one they had toyed with. They

raped his woman in front of him until she died, just like Lety. Then they did some interesting things to Negrito's second in command, the one who had Adiós, to show Negrito some of what was coming to him. When I got there, Negrito's second had only just died the day before. The rest of his men had either been killed or gotten clean away, so I didn't have to worry about anyone recognizing me. Negrito, you remember, had never seen me himself. I told Manco I wanted to join his band, that I could shoe horses and repair guns. I also told him Negrito had killed my best friend, not knowing then how true it was. He welcomed me with open arms after I fixed one of his favorite pistols that had a worn cocking mechanism. Negrito died a far worse death than I would have given him, and they finished by hanging him up on a tree just like Edmundo, only they stuffed his privates in his mouth while they were at it. Manco took Negrito's black stud, but I was included in the gambling for the other horses. I tried for your white mare but lost out. I didn't dare cheat that much all at once."

"What made you think you could win me? I might just as easily gone to Scar-Face or that awful pale-eyed youngster."

"You have Alonzo to thank for that. He taught me all about loaded dice. He even gave me a couple of pair he fixed himself. They're weighted so that if you throw them gently, you can get a seven most of the time, but if you throw them hard, as most do, they act like any other dice."

"I thought you were using his dice."

"I knew he was suspicious, so I switched them earlier and put the same mark on my dice that was on his."

"It nearly didn't work at that."

"Well, I knew I could always pick a fight with him as he did with me. The men are always fighting over the women here."

"What if you hadn't won? He looked as if he knew what

he was doing with that knife."

Tom grinned again and offered her the cigar. "I wouldn't have had to worry about it then, would I?"

"You seem awfully pleased with yourself. Were you planning just to stay with Manco's band forever?"

"No, I was planning to go all right, but I wanted to stay a long enough time to make my leaving plausible. It never occurred to me you and Antonio would be silly enough to sit there after Carlos was fit to travel."

"You might at least have left a note," she said accusingly. "Speaking of notes, Antonio gave me one."

"I know," he broke in. "If everything went right, when you screamed and I fired those shots, he got away. They might not even know he's gone yet."

"I thought you didn't like him."

"We're really too different to be close friends or anything like that, and I don't trust him with you, but on the other hand I had a hard time stomaching what they did even to Negrito, whom I hated. Sometimes in my sleep I can still hear him scream. These Indians and *mestizos* around here would put an Apache or Yaqui to shame when it comes to torture—you wouldn't believe what you can do with only a piece of wet rawhide and a box of matches."

"I want to see the note anyhow."

He struck a match and got up, tossing her pants to her. She found the note and read it by the next match. "When you reach Manzanillo, ask for the family Pedrazo y Castillo, they will know where I am. Take care, my love—I'm waiting for you. A."

"'My love' indeed!" Tom exclaimed. He put a match to the paper over Ellen's cry of protest. "Let's not have another smoke incident. If something goes wrong, I don't want anyone to know that we might have helped him or where he can be found. Everyone in Mexico seems to have relatives all over, and if Manco really wanted him, he

would think nothing of reaching into Manzanillo to get him."

"You once called me 'love' yourself, though I'm sure you've forgotten it."

"As well I might. Love isn't exactly at the top of my list these days."

"You mean up there with important things like hate and revenge?"

"Don't be nasty. Look at Manco, the only time in his life he ever came close to loving someone, and then had to see her killed at a circus, for God's sake."

"You know, I'll bet he was a handsome boy about the time that *gringa* got hold of him. He looks almost pure Indian with those cheekbones and oriental eyes. I wonder if he'll take over Negrito's territory now?"

"I don't think so. Negrito had a surprising organizational ability considering his lack of education. Dark as he was, he was more Spaniard than Indian. As you point out, Manco is more Indian than Spaniard, and Indians don't cooperate nor do they make plans for outside their own territory unless it's just a raid. No, the country north of Guadalajara will be divided up all over again among those strong enough to hold it. Negrito's demise may save many a *hacienda* up there. In fact, Salvador may even be able to restore ours now. Would you consider going back?"

"Never! Mexico terrifies me. The violence and the cruelty and the killing are a part of the land; I could never feel easy again. Besides, I don't like the way you treat your women. It's as Antonio said, the woman comes somewhere between a man's horse and his dog."

"Not always, Ellen."

That night he called out Carlos's name several times in his sleep, and she knew that his good-humored facade was all that stood between him and, as he himself said, smashing to pieces. Carlos was indeed still with them.

CHAPTER XVI

She wakened to find him leaning on an elbow looking at her. Outside it was just getting light. She yawned and stretched, then raised her eyebrows at him questioningly.

"At least you don't snore," he said, grinning.

"That's more than I can say for you," she answered tartly.

He looked surprised. "No one ever complained before," he protested.

"Not exactly snoring; I guess recounting your life history might be more like it."

His eyes darkened, and for a moment they mirrored his inner agony before going a hard bright blue again. "I talked in my sleep."

"Don't worry, I couldn't understand a word, though heaven knows I tried." She smiled reassuringly.

His face relaxed. "I'd best get up or I'll forget my better nature entirely and leap on you with a roar."

He rose to his feet in one quick neat motion and

dressed with his back to her. She was quite sure she knew why, and smiled. A woman could cover up physical desire quite successfully, but a man, never. Then it was her turn, and she didn't bother to turn her back. When someone has delivered your child, it's a little late to worry about physical modesty.

When they left the tent, she saw that the sun was just hitting the tops of the hills around the valley. The air was fresh and cold enough to show their breath. There were several fires going already, but here and there were sleeping men who in their drunkenness had dropped wherever they happened to be. She walked out to the side past three of the women squatting with their skirts about them and gossiping unconcernedly with each other as they performed their various natural functions. She felt foolish having to find a boulder to get behind and for once wished she had a skirt, too.

As she came out from behind the boulder, she saw Tom waiting for her. "For God's sake look abject," he warned her. "In fact, look downright scared of me." She saw with satisfaction that her nail marks still showed on his cheek.

She cowered mockingly.

"Don't joke!" he snapped. "Manco's watching our every move."

Indeed he was, for he gestured to them to join him at his fire where he was shovelling beans and meat into his mouth with a *tortilla*. "So, *hijo*, you spent a lively night, I hear. You've got the marks of it as well." He laughed loudly, a gold tooth showing in his mouth.

Ellen shrank behind Tom, who jerked her back out in front of him. "I would have had a less exciting time if this wildcat hadn't tried to show her claws. She's broken in now, though."

"Is she now? Too bad she isn't Mexican. I'd like to try riding a wild mare like that myself. Sit down, Guero, have some beans."

She started to sit too, but Tom gave her a stinging slap on the behind. "Serve me, wench. You're not in California now." He turned to Manco. "Those *gringo* men have no *cojones*, they're like oxen with their women."

She got a plate, heaped it with beans and meat, and as if by accident upset it on his lap. "Don't hit me! Don't hit me!" she cried, throwing her arms over her head.

Tom sprang up with an oath. The beans had been very hot, "Dammit, can't you do anything right?"

Manco laughed. "Looks to me like maybe she isn't all that broken in after all, my friend. Maybe she needs more riding?"

Tom sat down again and gingerly took the refilled plate. "Just for that you can do without breakfast and spend the time washing my pants."

Ellen took a chance. "I'm only sorry I didn't put them in the lap of your murdering bandit friend as well. Revolutionaries!" She gave a snort of disgust.

Manco grinned wolfishly. "Be glad we're not revolutionaries, *gringa*. You would be dead and the villages hereabouts looted and burned. I've kept my tribute reasonable, and in return I protect them from jackals like that *cabrón* Negrito. Ask them in Morelia what it's like to live around a real revolutionary. Zapata's men come into a village, not always a *hacienda* village, either, and they kill the men and rape the women. They take all the food they can carry, and they burn the rest, even the crops in the fields. Who doesn't die quickly in the raid starves slowly afterward. You can have revolutionaries." He spit on the ground.

Scar-Face came running up. "The *médico*, he's gone! He killed Luis with his own gun and took his horse as well!"

"*Madre de Diós*, I'm surrounded by idiots," Manco yelled, furious. "When did he go, could you tell?"

"Well, Luis is stiff and cold, so I suppose it must have been during the night."

Manco chewed his thumbnail and thought a minute. In the daylight his face was deeply grooved, like weathered stone, and he looked tired. "Chirlo, get a couple of men and see if you can track him. He's got such a lead I'm afraid we won't take him, but we should try."

"I've got a better idea," Tom said. Ellen surreptitiously dipped a *tortilla* in the bean pot and ate it. No one paid any attention. "I beat out of the woman last night that they were going to Colima where the *médico* has relatives." Manco started to say something, but Tom put up his hand. "I know, you can't very well go into a garrisoned town like Colima, but I can. The woman and I will take the wagon, I'll paint out the circus sign and put on it that I'm a farrier, that I shoe and doctor horses. I'll use the woman as bait, and we'll bring him out trussed up like a chicken in the back of the wagon to where you're waiting."

"That's not a bad plan," Manco said musingly. "Not a bad plan at all. I want that doctor so bad I can taste it."

While Manco called together the men, Tom went to catch the sorrel mare, Adió's, and the mules. Mounted on Adió's, he led the other animals out to the wagon. Though the mare was saddled, he gestured for Ellen to walk. That was carrying things a bit too far, she fumed as she tramped along in his dust. She knew it was to make up for her spilling the beans in his lap, and she comforted herself that they must have burned him plenty.

Coming back to the wagon was like coming home again. Tom swung off his horse, rummaged in the back of the wagon, and came out with several cans of paint.

"We're not going to cover up the paintings we did, are we?" Ellen asked, worried. Seeing her painting of the hills of home, primitive as it was, had always given her hope and comfort. Tom's unicorn and maiden she understood better now. Virgins trapped you so that they could destroy your freedom and kill you in the bargain. Then she herself was no threat, she thought dryly: she had lost her

maidenhood more than two years ago under the sycamores of California. Would that she were there now.

When they had blacked out the lettering, *Circo Deme-
trio*, Tom wiped the brushes while she packed food and water brought on one of the mules. "We'll put red lettering on the side after his black paint dries," Tom said. They hitched up the mules, put the mare's saddle inside the wagon, and Tom rode *Adiós* while she drove.

They threaded their way down through the pines, some of the driving proving very tricky as the wheels slid on the dry pine needles. Several vultures soared in circles high overhead, in the air seeming as graceful as they were ugly on the ground with their raw necks and cruel faces. A vermilion flycatcher darted across their path as they traversed an open meadow, the flash of bright scarlet so fast that it might have been a glint of colored light. Even in this driest of seasons, the grass of the meadows was sprinkled with tiny flowers of all hues, miniature forerunners of the blaze of wildflower brilliance in early October.

At last they came to where they had camped, and Tom rode over to the smoke structure. "Good!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "They were so busy taking your cooked pig they forgot to look for the jerky. It's a good thing ants don't like smoke." He lifted the branches from the top and handed her clusters of the smoked strips of pork, putting the last one in his mouth.

"Where is he buried?" he asked after a silence.

"I'll show you."

They walked just beyond where the horses had been corraled, and in the shade of a pine near the stream there was a cairn of rocks with a wooden headboard, "Here Lies Carlos Alvarez Escobar y Mendoza, RIP."

"Who made the headboard?"

"I did."

"As the Romans used to say, *sit terra tibi levis*," he murmured. "May the earth rest lightly upon you, Carlitos."

He stood brooding over the grave for so long that she walked silently away and left him to his thoughts. It must have been half an hour before he reappeared, his face drawn and somber. They mounted up and were on their way down to the track and from there down to the main road, the clinking of the harness and creak of wood the only sounds she heard.

They had been going for about an hour when Ellen heard from behind the thudding of many horses' hoofs. Before long, the hoofbeats overtook the wagon, and Manco's men streamed by on both sides, making of the wagon a kind of island in a river of horseflesh. There must have been about thirty of them, she decided as she talked to the restless mules who wanted to join the gallop. A few of the riders were peon whites, but most of them settled for a white shirt buttoned up to the neck, dark pants, large *sombrero* hats, high boots, a bright serape slung over the shoulder, and the ever-present cartridge belts crossed over their chests. She recognized Luz in the group, easy to pick out because she was white, and the white-lathered neck and tossing head of the black Tom had ridden from Guadalajara.

The road wound down a canyon with a river at the bottom. Where the canyon opened up into a valley, the river bent southwest toward Colima and the coast. The way led through a village with a sawmill at the bend, the dirt streets lined with jacaranda trees still blooming, primavera green with leaves where lately they had blossomed bright gold, and flame trees in the full glory of their red plumage. It was so unusual to see a town planted heavily with trees that she never forgot the place, called Senquique. The road went down the side of a steep ravine, crossed a stone bridge over a feeder stream, and climbed again, running along the steep hillside overlooking the river below. Even in the dry season, ferns and brush and slender white trunked trees formed a carpet of green down the slope plunging into the river. Finally they came out on

a rolling plateau above a broad fertile valley that the river made fruitful all year. There was grain and corn and sugar cane all in various shades of green, and on the far side cattle grazed on the rising hillside slopes.

The sun was just going down as the wagon reached a little stand of pines near the road. Tom was waiting for her there, a fire already built near a level place for the wagon. She noticed, though, that *Adiós* was still saddled. They unharnessed the mules and she started dinner, pork jerky cooked with onions, green tomatoes, and chiles. As she patted out the corn *masa* for the *tortillas*, she watched Tom, who was fidgeting about the campsite.

"Where are the others?" she asked finally.

"There's a village down the way, Sonila, where they intend to find themselves a *cantina* and some women as well, any who are foolish enough to stay in town."

"Is that why you're fussing around as if you were about to miss a train?"

He glanced at her startled, then looked a little sheepish. "If you must know," he said at last, "I plan to get drunk tonight, and I don't think I'd be good company."

"You won't find it much solace. Are you going to try for a woman, too?"

"Any woman who will lie with a stranger in a town like that will be a real pig, and probably syphilitic besides. No thank you. I'm not that hard up."

She felt relieved. "Don't you want to eat first? Eating in *cantinas* will give you a good dose of dysentery."

They ate in a silence that was friendly, not hostile. "Will you be back in time to help hitch up the mules in the morning, or should I go ahead and catch up with you in Sonila?"

"I'll be back. I wouldn't leave you all night."

"How are you going to get back when you're that drunk?"

He grinned then. "Ellen, I wish I had a peso for every

time in my life I've had to ride home liquored up."

She watched him ride off on the chestnut stallion and ached for him. She found it hard to imagine what it was like, not belonging anywhere. Though she might never see it again, she knew very well where she belonged, in those impossibly distant golden hills with the dark green oak woods and green and silver sycamores growing down the ravines. There was never an arid time of the year there with the dust blowing in curtains of grit and the grass so sparse it exposed the bare bones of the hills. If she closed her eyes, she could see and smell and feel that wonderful country.

She was sitting in the wagon sewing later that night, mending her riding clothes that had acquired various rips and tears. The soft light of the kerosene lamp made the wagon seem friendly, the closest thing to a home she had right now. She looked up as she heard a horse outside. It didn't seem to have taken Tom long to have gotten a skiful, she thought. With the lamp in her hand she went out in her nightgown in case he wasn't fit to see to *Adiós*. The light blinded her so that she was almost up on the horse before realizing it wasn't *Adiós*. Grinning down at her from the horse's back was Chirlo, Scar-Face, obviously delighted that she seemed to welcome him so eagerly.

Foolish with surprise, she exclaimed, "You're not Tomás!"

The scar looked livid on his dark face. "And what if I'm not? Instead of that cheating *cabrón*, I should have had you along—you'd know then what a man was like."

As he dismounted clumsily, she began to break away. "Keep your hands off! When Tomás returns, he will kill you!"

Chirlo laughed hoarsely. "When I last saw him, he was sitting with a bottle of mescal for company, putting it down fast. You'll not see him again tonight, and if I have

anything to do with it, not ever."

He made a lunge for her, managing to catch the edge of her nightgown that kept her from moving fast enough to escape him entirely. Desperate, she threw the lamp at him. The base of it hit his upraised arm, making him curse, then it dropped to the ground, breaking and flaring up as the released kerosene caught fire. With a roar of sheer drunken rage, he dodged back from the fire and ran after her as she lifted her nightgown skirt and fled, wishing that the sandals she had put on against scorpions had been shoes or even boots. Just as she thought she might get clear away, her sandal caught on a protruding stick and she went down full length, the wind knocked out of her.

With a growl he was upon her, trying to kiss her as she threw her head from side to side. "Lie still, you bitch!" and he gave her a brutal blow on the side of her face. Half-stunned, she stopped struggling momentarily and he tore the nightgown down the front. As he fumbled with his trousers, she began to fight again, hitting him in the face, which only made him grasp both her wrists in his large hand that closed like a vise. With his knee he forced her legs apart, and twist as she might, she could not get away. She was almost suffocated by his fetid breath sweet with cane alcohol. As he tried to enter her, she suddenly realized that this time at any rate she would not be raped, and she started to laugh half-hysterically.

"You can't do it! You drank too much and you can't do it," she gasped, still laughing.

With an oath he raised his free hand to hit her again, but the hand remained high while his face assumed an inward agonized look. He groaned then, and tried to reach around behind his back. Not until he pitched over on her, blood running from his mouth, did she see the knife in his back, and Tom kneeling almost at her feet, his face a blur in the dark.

"I was afraid if I shot him, I'd shoot you, too. Oh God

Ellen, what did he do to you?" he said as he pulled Chirlo off her.

She laughed again, shakily. "Nothing. The poor devil drank too much, and he couldn't have taken Cleopatra."

He pulled her to him, and she noticed with surprise that he was shivering as much as she was. She could smell the mescal and the cigars on him, strangely a marvellous familiar smell that mingled with the odor of his skin made her feel like staying in his arms and never moving, ever. He was the one to break away, putting his jacket over her shoulders and walking with her back toward the wagon.

"What about him?"

He shrugged. "Tomorrow we'll bury him. That crew in Sonila won't get started until the sun's well up. They're all drunk as lords and half of them passed out completely. Even Manco's the worse for wear. I'll turn his horse loose tonight, though."

"Why did you come back so soon?"

"Did you ever try to get drunk to forget something? No, of course you didn't. It's a damn fool thing to do, and it doesn't work. I looked at all those other drunken animals supposedly having fun, and I came away."

They entered the wagon and she lit the other lamp. "I don't have another nightgown," she said almost humorously.

He looked at her, his face open and tender. "Here," he said, "this ought to do fine, though what you want a nightgown for I can't think." He handed her one of his shirts, which came halfway down to her knees. He picked up a nearly empty bottle of mescal from the floor of the wagon and handed it to her. "Take a swig," he advised. "You'll feel better." He peered at her closely. "You're going to have a mouse," he said gently. "I wish now I'd cut the gentleman's testicles off before I killed him."

"A mouse?"

He grinned. "A black eye. My reputation among my

peers should be enhanced no end. Women are supposed to be beaten every now and again to keep them honest and loving."

"I'm going to go to bed, Tom. I'm cold. I don't think I'll ever get warm again."

"Go along then. I'll sleep over by the campfire so I won't bother you with the talking in my sleep you say I do."

"Tom?"

"Um?"

"Would you be angry if I asked you something?"

"I don't know. What is it?"

"A long time ago you asked me one night to hold you. Would you hold me tonight? I'm cold and I'm scared."

"Of course I will," he said gently, as if to a sick child. "I'll turn Chirlo's horse loose and see to Adiós. Here, have another swig, it's good for the nerves if for nothing else." He handed her the bottle and went out.

He was right about the liquor, it warmed and relaxed her and almost made her forget her sore face. He came in finally, leaving the door open. Cupping his hands around a match, he lit a cigar and handed it to her. "Here, love. If we're going to be in the same bed together, you'd best smell of cigar smoke, too."

She smiled sleepily at him as she drew on the cigar. "I could never smell the way you do. You've got a lovely smell."

He looked at her as he unbuttoned his shirt. "You're not so bad yourself."

Later, when he had blown out the lamp and come to bed, he held her tight and drew a long, shuddering breath. "My God, when I came back and found Chirlo's bay standing there untied, I thought maybe he'd killed you."

"Would you have cared so much? I must be an awful burden on you." She was shamelessly fishing.

"I lost Carlos. The only thing I can still do for him is not to lose you as well."

Ask a foolish question and get a foolish answer, she thought. Carlos, always Carlos . . . He would never die but would be with her always, dragging his stick along like a tail and laughing at the mark it made in the dirt. With a sigh she turned in his arms until her back was to him, but she could feel him lying warm against her.

That night he neither cried out nor wept.

The next morning they climbed wordlessly out of bed at first light and, taking the large shovel and the trowel, went to where Chirlo's body lay. Ellen pushed aside the pine needles while Tom went through the pockets to remove any identification, and they both began to dig. Under the trees the ground became damper and easier to pierce as they went deeper. They rolled him over into the newly dug grave and covered him with dirt. Ellen was thankful he was face down when they threw the dirt on his head. They put back the pine needles and between the two of them lifted a heavy fallen bough and covered the grave with it.

"That should keep anything from digging him up for several years anyway," Tom said, brushing off his hands. "You act as if you're sorry I killed him. Antonio's killing Luis didn't seem to bother you though, did it?"

"Maybe I care more about what you do. Oh, I know there was no help for it, but I can't keep from thinking that if you'd hit him over the head and knocked him out instead—"

He took hold of her shoulders. "Ellen, Ellen, where have you been all this time? You saw what they did to poor little Lety, to Edmundo, to Carlos. Do you think for a moment they would hesitate to do the same to us?"

"It wasn't Manco's band that did all those things."

"No, they were only going to torture Antonio because Manco's woman died. If I hadn't killed Chirlo, he would have had a bullet in my back before the day was out. I don't like killing, either, but when it's kill or be killed, what else is there to do? Even the act of love becomes a

bludgeon for men like these. There's no way to survive without becoming at least a little like them." He held up his hands. "Are these a murderer's hands? Tell me now, Ellen."

She shook her head miserably. "My hands are as bloody as yours, Tom. If I could have gotten his gun, I'd have shot him myself, but I'd have felt guilty about it afterward."

"And you think I don't. You think I like sticking a knife in a man's unprotected back? I saw him on you, about to strike you, and all I could think of was to kill him before he delivered that blow. I almost wish now I'd not come back. You'd have a sore crotch maybe and few more bruises, but the man would be alive."

Her face paled. "You don't mean that. I can't believe you resent me so for being alive when Carlos is dead. You'd really rather see me beaten and violated?"

He flinched as if she'd struck him. "You want it both ways, don't you? Any way as long as I'm wrong. Well, at least leave Carlos out of it," he said coldly. "You can't understand what having a close friend is all about, can you?"

Juanita had said the same thing, Ellen remembered. Beyond words now, she only stared at him.

He shook his head wearily. "Come on, let's go get some breakfast before we say more unforgivable things."

They ate and packed up in silence. A half hour's ride brought them to Sonila, a pretty little town with each adobe house front painted a different color: reds, yellows, blues, greens, all bright colors softened by weathering. Manco sat outside the *cantina* on the main street with a bottle and waved them on.

"We'll catch up with you soon enough," he called. "I'm hoping you can make Colima today or at worst early tomorrow. I've got a whole pack of missing men still to round up."

Ellen looked at Tom. "He doesn't know about Chirlo yet."

"Either the horse is off grazing somewhere or else someone stole him. Let's be on our way."

She clicked her tongue at the mules, and they continued through the town. Once again they went down a steep ravine to a stone bridge at the bottom, but this time the road was cobbled, which made the footing slippery, and twice one of the mules almost went down. They paused at the bottom to water the animals and fill their canteens and water containers. In April water could sometimes take travellers miles out of their way to find. Beyond the town, as they breasted a rise, she was startled by a close view of two great mountains that soared into the sky above them. One was a tall, sharp peak rising up against the intense blue above. Nearer was a rounded hump like a shoulder rising almost as high and showing a thin column of smoke drifting up from the top.

"Nevado and Fuego," Tom said, pulling up his horse alongside the wagon. "Nevado has snow at least on the north face just about any winter. Fuego, Fire, is a live volcano that erupts every hundred years or so, they say. It looks bald a good way down because it's all hardened lava."

"I didn't know Mexico even had live volcanoes."

"When you've got all these earthquakes and thermal springs, there's bound to be a lot of activity down there somewhere."

"At Yellowstone there are thermal springs and geysers, too, but no live volcanoes."

"How do you know? A volcano can come up in a matter of weeks or months, and a thousand years is nothing in a mountain's life. I wonder sometimes if a lot of these volcanoes considered extinct may not fool everybody some day."

The innocent looking plume of smoke rising out of

Fuego's interior gave her a delicious sense of danger. Why was it that danger from natural catastrophes seemed so much cleaner somehow than danger from mankind? Because there was no hate, she thought suddenly. God quite impersonally took lives with an earthquake or a tidal wave, but with men there was hate and a deliberate joy in killing.

Manco's men didn't pass them until late afternoon, and there was a notable lack of dash and merriment. Manco himself pulled up Negrito's black stallion next to Tom. "No sign of Chirlo?"

Tom shook his head. "Is he still missing?"

"We asked all over the countryside, but no one admitted to seeing him or his horse either. With that great scar, you couldn't very well forget him. I thought maybe he'd gone ahead."

"Maybe he has."

"If he's more than five miles from here, he'll never see us because that's about all we're going to make before dark. We lost Chico, too. He got so drunk he fell into the river bottom and broke his neck."

"An expensive party, wouldn't you say?" Tom asked brazenly.

"You should talk. I thought maybe you'd stayed sober last night when you left early, but I see you went on drinking at home." He pointed at Ellen, who had a black bruise around her eye and a tender swelling that extended over her cheekbone.

"You know what they say," Tom replied cheerfully. "Spare the rod and spoil the woman. She's a lively one though, I'll tell you!"

Ellen stared balefully at both of them. Manco clapped Tom on the shoulder and rode laughing after his men.

"You sounded as if you enjoyed beating me up," she accused him, for the first time that day with a twinkle in her eye.

"I eat girls like you for breakfast," Tom laughed.

"Tom, I don't want to camp with all those others. There'll be drinking again and trouble besides."

He nodded. "In a couple of miles we'll suddenly have wheel trouble. I want to get the rest of the painting on the wagon done anyway."

That evening she did the cooking of the everlasting jerky while he lettered the signs in red paint. "Dr. Faro," it said on both sides, "*Herrador y Albeitar*," blacksmith and veterinarian. Across the back and front he lettered: "*Curandero Para Todos Clases de Enfermadades*," healer for all kinds of illnesses. "*Traigan Sus Animales Enfermos HOY*," bring your sick animals today.

"Dr. Faro!" she laughed. "Where did you dream that one up?"

He grinned. "It came to me in a blinding flash of light. Actually, Dr. Faro was one of the most famous of the snake oil and patent medicine men in the southwest. He made a fortune on the theory that if you put enough opium and alcohol in anything, it was bound to make you feel better."

Without discussing it, they both slept in the wagon, but in separate beds.

"Tom?"

"Um."

"What's going to happen tomorrow?"

"Don't know. What I hope will happen is that we'll go into Colima and out the other side, leaving Manco sitting there waiting for us."

"After a day or so he'll realize he's been tricked, won't he? They won't have much trouble catching us."

"First of all, to chase us they'll have to circle clear around Colima, which will cost them at least a day. They don't dare tangle with the garrison of soldiers who would love to find them if they could. They've made monkey's out of the army for several years now. Second, we're not

going to look exactly the same when we leave Colima as we did going in."

It was just getting light when they had their breakfast of jerky wrapped in *tortillas* and coffee. Ellen noticed that the air was soft and warm and far more moist than it had been outside Sonila. "We aren't near the coast, are we?"

"No, but from Colima on it'll be coastal weather. This time of year the coast is cooler and damper in the daytime than Tocoalco, for example, or Santa Cruz, and warmer and damper at night."

They harnessed the mules again. When Ellen asked if they couldn't trade off and let her ride the mare, he shook his head. "It's *macho* to ride and not *macho* to drive a wagon. At least to Colima we'll have to do it this way. Your tail end getting sore?"

"Getting? It's been sore for two days." She rubbed her bottom with feeling.

"Your face looks better this morning anyway, except that your mouse has gone green and yellow."

"I'm a colorful personality, all right."

In the next village they found out that Manco's men had passed through the evening before, but the village after that said they galloped through this morning. "How far to Colima?" Tom asked an old man in a big *sombrero*.

"About eight kilometers, *más o menos*."

"Five miles isn't much," Tom said. "They'll have to stop pretty soon or chance running into a roadblock. If they've blocked the roads around Guadalajara, they'll do it here, too."

The road came around the bottom of Fuego, which loomed over them like a brooding hunchback, its plume of smoke still rising from the blunt crest. They looked down a long grassy slope toward the town of Colima, and were at once aware of a *melée* of horsemen a mile ahead of them. They heard the popping of shots and saw little puffs of blue smoke. The figures were far enough away to lend

an air of complete unreality to the battle.

"What in God's name did Manco think he was doing, coming this close on an open slope? Wouldn't he have thought he could see if there were any soldiers and outrun them?"

"This wasn't what we planned," Tom muttered. "Some of them are going to get away."

"What do you mean, planned?" Ellen demanded.

"Antonio and I had it all worked out before he escaped. He was to tell the garrison here the route Manco was taking so that an ambush could be set up. But this is no place for an ambush. The fools could have taken all of them and lost very few themselves."

She looked at him dumbstruck. "You and Antonio? I thought—"

"Yes, I know what you thought," Tom said impatiently. "I'm not all that keen on him, but without him we'd never have escaped. How else could we have gotten Manco himself to escort us to Colima?"

CHAPTER XVII

The toy-like figures went on with their battle, and they could see fallen figures and horses. A group of three horsemen suddenly broke away and began to gallop up the long slope toward them. One of them threw up his hands and fell backward off his running horse's rump, but the other two kept coming.

"The fools are going to founder their horses before they ever get here," Ellen said.

"It's either that or be killed. If anybody among those soldiers could shoot, they'd all three be dead long since."

One of the horses stumbled and went down, throwing his rider heavily. The remaining rider and the riderless horse kept coming. Tom drew his rifle from the saddle scabbard. As he came nearer, they saw it was Gallo, the boy with the pale eyes, on Tom's black. The horse was covered with white lather, and as the boy drew up, he stood with his head down and trembled.

"Give me your horse, quick!" Gallo shouted at Tom.

"I don't think I'm going to do that," Tom said mildly.

"You're well clear now. Walk that horse out slowly and lie up in the trees around the shoulder of the mountain there, and you'll be all right."

The boy started to draw his gun that he'd holstered when he saw he was getting away, but he found himself looking down the barrel of Tom's rifle. "Go along, son. I don't want to do anything I'd be sorry for. You're lucky I don't hold you for the soldiers."

"You *chingado* traitor!" the boy half sobbed. "You set us up, didn't you?"

"Not exactly. Did you ever see a more unlikely place for an ambush?"

The boy jerked up the black's head, and the last they saw of them the black was gamely plodding along on weak legs. For once his head was down and his tail quiet.

"That's one way to break a horse of bad habits," Tom smiled. "We'd better get started ourselves, though. I don't relish getting a bullet in the back, and there may be more who got away."

They started down the long slope. Where the skirmish had been, there were men dismounted examining the fallen. Partway down the slope, Ellen could see a horse struggling to rise, then falling back, and with a shock of pain she recognized Luz. The dark eyes were wild, panicked, and the silky white of her shoulder had turned red and sticky with blood. The bullet had slanted in through flesh and muscle, smashing into her shoulder bone.

"There's no way to help her," Tom said grimly. "We'll have to shoot her."

Ellen got down from the wagon and walked over to Luz. She talked soothingly to the mare and stroked the fine head, rubbing her ears the way she used to like. The mare quieted and lay still, looking awkward as all horses do when lying down. Tom put his pistol to her head, as Ellen went on stroking her gently and talking to her reassuringly. As the gun fired, the mare gave a great

shudder and lay still, the light gone from her eyes. Ellen bowed her head down on the mare's neck and wept for Luz and for all of the death and violence that seemed continually to surround them like befouled water that poisoned even the fish. Tom put his arm over her shoulders and patted her, his eyes bleak.

"I didn't know I had any tears left," she said at last, wiping her eyes on the sleeve of her shirt. "It's the animals that are so pitiful—they don't even know what it's all about."

They continued their way down the slope to where several soldiers, hardly more than boys, were standing. There were two horses down and some twenty shapeless bundles lying about in the dry grass. One of the soldiers rolled a cigarette, lit it, and walked over toward them as they approached.

"I hope it's all over, sergeant," Tom said in a friendly way. "Who were they?"

"A pack of bandits we've been after for a long time. It should have been Guadalajara's business to get them since most of their territory was in Jalisco, but they raided down this far from time to time."

"I know one got away—he tried to take my horse and we ended with a standoff. What about the rest? Did you get them all?"

"No, I'd say maybe a dozen managed to make off, some of them wounded, but we got their *jefe*, so that may do it." He walked over and pointed with his foot to a man lying on his back staring at the sky, his mouth pulled back in a dreadful grin. Large black flies were already walking across his face.

Ellen saw the stump at the end of his arm and looked away. No matter what he'd done, she had to be sorry. His turning outlaw was hardly of his own doing; he was a helpless product of brutality breeding brutality. This shabby death on a grassy slope belittled his humanity. He

had hated, yes, but he had loved, too. It occurred to her that perhaps he had ridden so reckless down this open hillside to seek oblivion.

"Those poor women," she said almost to herself in English, "waiting and waiting up in that little valley, and only a few will ever come back."

Tom looked at her. "You'd feel sorry for the Devil himself, wouldn't you?"

"I feel sorry for the whole of Mexico, and the pity of it all is breaking my heart."

He touched her shoulder briefly and went back to questioning the soldier in Spanish. "Who's your *comandante*?"

"Colonel Lopez. The general is in Manzanillo."

"Be seeing you, sergeant, thanks."

They went on down that terrible sloping field until they came to the first houses of Colima. The streets were narrow and many of them unpaved, but through the occasional open doorways of houses they passed, they could see inner patios riotous with color and greenery: bougainvillea, elephant ears, cup of gold, cannas, angel's trumpet, oleander, and a host of plants and flowers unfamiliar to them both. They passed several parks, half-wild with a profusion of tropical growth where children shouted and played. They could catch glimpses of the twin spires of the cathedral, and when they came out on the plaza, they saw the old Palacio de Gobierno dating from the days of the Spaniards. There Tom inquired for Colonel Lopez and was told that though he had an office there, he spent most of his time out in the barracks area on the eastern edge of town.

"Why do you want to see him?" Ellen asked.

"I want to know what conditions are to the southwest on the road to Manzanillo. Surely they'll have such an important road well patrolled."

They headed out of town again toward a collection of

weathered adobe barrack buildings and stables. A sentry stopped them at the gate, but let them through when they asked for the colonel. Hitching the mules and Adiós in front, they entered a bare adobe building with plaster peeling off the walls in scabrous patches. The cement floor echoed their footsteps as they were directed upstairs to a line of offices. After cooling their heels for an hour in an outer office where a bored corporal filed his nails interminably, the colonel returned from wherever he had been and brusquely beckoned them in.

Adjusting his pince-nez glasses and carefully stroking his luxurious mustaches, he asked, "What can I do for you? We already have our own blacksmith and horse doctor, you know."

"We're on our way to Manzanillo, colonel, where this lady is to take ship to California. Her husband was killed by bandits, and as his *compadre*, I am her protector. We need to know how the road is between here and the port."

The colonel tapped a pen against his teeth. "You *were* going to Manzanillo. Right now you're not going anywhere. We've had a major uprising of *hacienda* workers—I refuse to call them revolutionaries—and we have to send supply trains through with armed guards. There isn't a bridge left intact between here and Manzanillo. The whole stretch is a wasteland overrun by hundreds of angry peons. When Madero was killed, they went berserk and left the mangos and papayas and bananas to rot on the ground. With our men split between Colima and Manzanillo, we have no way of doing much about it until reinforcements arrive—if they arrive. Zapata is marauding in force in the south, and Villa has risen again in the north. We can't have civilians cluttering up the supply trains, it's all we can do to protect them as it is. For what it's worth, my advice would be to plan to settle here for a month or so until things quiet down."

Ellen started to protest, but Tom kicked her ankle

impatiently. "In that case, could we perhaps telegraph her husband's family in Zacatecas and her father in California?" Tom asked meekly. "They told me in town that all telegraph communications have to be authorized by you. Neither family knows she's alive—or even that her husband is dead." Tom looked ingratiating, and Ellen gave the colonel her most winning smile.

"Yes, yes," Lopez said impatiently. "Here," and he handed Tom an all but illegible scrawl. "Present that at the telegraph office, and if the *cabrones*—beg your pardon, madame—haven't cut the wires to the north again, you should get your word through."

"By the way," Tom said as an afterthought, "did a doctor named Antonio Garcia see you about the bandit gang you people tangled with north of town this morning?"

The colonel scowled. "No, never heard of him. A busybody army captain from Manzanillo's intelligence section tried to get me to send out men on an ambush mission. Seems that some fool general with no better sense than to try to travel from Guadalajara to Manzanillo raised hell over this Manco's activities. With the trouble to the southwest, I didn't have the men for it even if I'd wanted to, and I told him so."

Ellen gave Tom an anguished look. "Antonio didn't make it."

He shook his head. "He may turn up yet." He turned to the colonel. "Why were your men up there, then?"

Lopez sighed wearily and rubbed his hand over his face. "They were mostly new recruits on a field problem. That side of town is the only place that's been safe for practice maneuvers. If it hadn't been for two seasoned sergeants with them, they'd probably all have been wiped out, and as it was we lost seven."

Ellen couldn't help but think how young even the sergeant they had talked to was. Tom was puzzled. "Just

out of curiosity, what were they practicing, colonel?"

"Coming up on the enemy across open country. They were supposed to be working their way on their bellies using the grass as cover and trying not to shoot themselves with their own rifles while they were at it. On horseback, those bandits were like sitting ducks. If they'd been on foot, most of them would have gotten away."

"We won't take up any more of your time, colonel. Thank you for the telegraph permission. Have you any suggestions as to where we can stay?"

"If that wagon has room, I'd plan on staying there. We've got a town packed with refugees right now, and I don't think there's room for a mouse. Unhitch in one of the parks, and you'll have better accommodation than half the people in town."

They found the telegraph office manned by a couple of corporals playing cards. They gave one of them the colonel's chit, and Ellen tried to think how to word the messages. To Salvador she would simply say that Edmundo and Carlos were both dead, and that she was returning to California. She wasn't sure her father would care, but she said she was going to try to leave Manzanillo in the next week or two, depending on shipping departures, and would he wire money.

"Take out that last part, about the money," Tom said. "I've got more than enough that I took from the *hacienda*, and I know Carlos would want you to have it."

"What about you?"

He smiled grimly. "I've got some funds stashed in Guadalajara that weren't in Martín's bank, and I've got money my father left me in the United States plus a lot of railroad and mining stock. I won't starve. You might tell your father that Carlos is dead, though."

"I wouldn't give him the satisfaction," she flared. "He'll either be willing to see both of us or else I won't go there." She thought despairingly of the early morning sun red-

dening the golden hills while mist like smoke still lay in the draws.

"I'd be careful of closing that last door if I were you," Tom advised. "If your father refuses to answer, then what will you do?"

"I'll get work somewhere, I'll make out."

"What do you know how to do?" he asked cruelly. "Finishing schools are hardly noted for equipping anyone to hold a job, and lady horse breakers are not exactly in great demand."

She gave him a ghost of a smile. "Perhaps I'll join a circus."

His mouth twitched and he touched her shoulder again.

That night they camped in a wild, overgrown park near the edge of town. Magenta and red and tangerine bougainvillea overran many of the trees, throwing brilliant streamers up to the very top branches, and ferns, purple-flowered creepers, and pink-blossomed vines ran riot over the ground. In the middle of the park was a partially cleared area that had once been a small brick plaza with a round, roofed, cement bandstand complete with elaborate wrought iron fencing enclosing the part where the band once blared cheerfully forth over strolling Sunday crowds, and Ellen smiled as she remembered the attempted uniforms and the earnestness with which a band in Mazatlan played "La Paloma" when she and Carlos were there. With *machetes* she and Tom cut away the vines that had threatened to swallow the plaza and wide brick path leading to it from the street.

"All those flowers look pretty," Tom said, "but in there live enough ticks and chiggers and other stinging things to eat us alive."

They allowed themselves a celebration cup each of mescal and water while they waited for the last of the jerky to cook in a stew. They had been able to find onions and

tomatoes, a few wizened carrots, and even a few eggs in a little neighborhood *tienda*. Early the next morning they hoped to find meat in the municipal market, but Tom told her not to expect it; in a surrounded town, meat might be at a premium. They sat companionably staring at the fire they had managed to make from a dead tree long since strangled by the bougainvillea.

"Tom, if we're to stay here for so long, why don't you go on back to Guadalajara? There's no sense in you having to cool your heels here in Colima for months waiting for reinforcements that may never come. I'll throw myself on the mercy of the good colonel and find a place to live somehow. He might even relent after a time and let me go with one of the supply trains."

Tom looked at her in silence for a moment. "Do you want me to go?"

She almost said yes to set him free, but in the end could do nothing but shake her head wordlessly.

"That's good, because I wouldn't have gone anyway. Carlos would have expected me to see you to Manzanillo, and that's what I'll do."

Carlos again, she thought resentfully. When would he allow himself to realize that Carlos was dead? Dammit, why couldn't he have said he wouldn't leave her because he cared what happened to her? She would have said the same for him or Antonio or the general or Juanita or any of them. There is a special close relationship that grows up among people in trouble together that makes possible reunions of ex-soldiers who would otherwise be expected to want nothing less than remembering the war and the killing in which they were once engaged. Without compromising his feelings he could have used that closeness if nothing else as an excuse not to desert her. Carlos, always Carlos...

"I've got an idea as to how we can get out of here without waiting," Tom went on, obviously not sensing her

reaction. "We'll see tomorrow if it's possible."

She lay awake for a long time that night. Tom had sat outside the wagon smoking a cigar and thinking what thoughts she could not guess. He came in silently, undressed in the dark, and climbed into the top bunk. It was as if the shattered head of Carlos still slept on the pillow in the bottom bunk. Why was she finding it harder and harder to remember him as he once was, whole and proud and very male? Whenever she thought of him now, it was as a childlike creature wandering through the corridors of his memories, happily dragging a stick behind him.

It was still dark when they came to the market, a crowded collection of stalls jammed together under a tin roof. Bloody pieces of beef and pork hung on great iron hooks in the meat section. Nearby was a stall with dried fish and next to it a woman beheading and plucking scrawny chickens. Elsewhere were papayas, green mangos, small green oranges, plums, bananas of every kind from the sweet finger variety to the huge cooking plantains, onions with their green sprouts intact, tomatoes, small tart yellow lemons, more of the wizened carrots, strings of garlic, mounds of green and black avocados, baskets of six or more different kinds of chiles both red and green, piles of green coconuts, pyramids of green sheathed early corn from the river bottoms where there was water, bins of different kinds of dried beans—speckled, pink, tan, black, all kinds of dried herbs, strings of dark red *chorizo* sausage, candles, kerosene lamps, material for clothing, sacks of animal food, tools, and rope. There were cauldrons of frying *chicharrones*, pork crackling, women patting corn *masa* into *tortillas* and *gorditos*, *guisado* stews, meat roasting on charcoal fires. It certainly didn't look as if there was any shortage of food in the town.

"Good," Tom said delightedly, "it's just as I thought, there's another route open besides the main road to Man-

zanillo. We know all that didn't come from the north, so there's bound to be a secondary road to the east or west, maybe both. I have some things to look for, you buy the food. Here," and he handed her some silver coins.

She did all right until she came to the meat stalls. There was a crowd of shouting, gesticulating women there, and newcomers elbowed her aside as they arrived. In half an hour she was no closer to getting any meat than she had been in the beginning.

"I wouldn't let a little thing like that lick me," Tom said in her ear, laughing. "Watch me."

He plowed into the crowd of women and in no time was up at the front where he bellowed at the butchers in a voice that drowned out the others. He came back grinning and bearing some large chunks of meat wrapped in a bloody newspaper. "It's all in knowing how," he told her loftily.

"Nonsense! You only got away with it because you're a man. I tried that a couple of times and nearly got my ribs broken."

"I'm hungry, what about you?" he asked.

Ellen, whose mouth had been watering ever since they arrived at the market, agreed enthusiastically. They bought platefuls of roasted beef, avocado mashed with chiles, onions, tomatoes, and lemon juice, a dish of *no-pales*, a stack of *tortillas*, and coffee in thick china mugs, and sat down at one of the long tables of unfinished wooden planks. Those already eating moved to make room for them, and as they wolfed down their food, a welcome change from jerky stew, Tom bantered with the people at the table, telling of some of their adventures in a droll manner, at times eliciting loud guffaws of laughter. By the time their meal was over, however, he knew of two possible ways to Manzanillo besides the main road, but also that they were blocked by soldiers, more to keep revolutionaries out than to keep townspeople in. How-

ever, the colonel wasn't keen on civilians who might cause incidents wandering over the countryside without a very good reason, and the soldiers questioned closely all who wished to pass.

They carried their purchases out to the wagon and drove back to their park. Tom had bought a number of things wrapped in a cheap brown paper and newspaper, among them a large can of black paint along with larger brushes than they'd used before.

"Time to go to work," he said cheerfully.

"Oh Tom, do we have to cover over the pictures we did? I'll miss them dreadfully."

"I know, but you'd have had to say goodbye to them in a few days anyway. I'm not sure I'm so happy to have my views of women exposed to the world forever, either."

"Is that really your view of us? As murderers of beauty?"

"I don't know anymore, Ellen. Maybe it never was." He handed her a brush.

They worked most of the day on the wagon, painting even the wheel spokes black. "It looks like a coffin," Ellen protested.

"It's supposed to. We're going to be a hearse, and you're going to be the dead body."

She laughed uncertainly. "Won't that be bad luck, to mock the dead?"

"Do you want to go to Manzanillo or don't you?"

He was gone for part of the late afternoon on Adiós, and came back with still more packages. "A lot of trouble, but it should prove worth it. Neither the soldiers nor the rebels will want to fool with a hearse."

The next morning they worked for several hours on the finishing touches, black material to hang in scollops around the top of the wagon and to tuck into the mules' harness. He had even managed to find two large ladies' hats with black plumes for rich widows. The plumes

would grace the mule's heads. There was enough material left over to make lightweight black cooling blankets for the two led horses and a sheet to put over Ellen. Tom himself was resplendent in a long black claw-hammer coat, a striped cravat, and a very uncomfortable looking collar, topped off with a black bowler hat.

Ellen giggled. "You should have a top hat."

He grinned. "I couldn't find any that came near to fitting. I guess I've got a big head."

"You certainly do," she teased, suddenly feeling very happy. There was something comforting in this final thumbing noses at the death that had pursued them since February. She realized now why soldiers joked so constantly and often macabrely with each other. It was a negation of sorrow and fear and death and killing.

As they turned out of the park to clop through the town, Tom pointed at a tree. "Look, parrots!"

The bright birds squawked and chattered, fluttering from branch to branch of the enormous hardwood tree. They were like an omen of better things to come. At the outskirts of town Ellen climbed down and entered the wagon. Tom laid her out on her own bed and covered her with the black cloth, draping it about her head so that only her face showed. He folded her bare arms over her breast and inserted in her limp fingers some vile looking velvet flowers. "For God's sake don't sneeze," he said. "You make an admirable corpse."

The wagon bumped and jolted for what seemed hours before it finally came to a halt. "Where are you going?" a voice asked.

"I'm taking this poor lady to her family in Tecoman. They say you can't get through on the main road, so I'm taking her the long way around through Manzanillo."

"Open up," the voice said.

Tom opened the rear door. "Look at her," he said proudly. "She looks like she's alive, don't she? Don't

know when I've done a better job."

The soldier's silence was eloquent, and the door slammed. Another voice said, "This road to the coast is pretty rough, I hope you make it. In the rainy season it's impassable. Say, where did you get those mules? Don't know as I've seen any that big."

"A place north of Guadalajara breeds them," Tom replied truthfully. "Have a cigar on me, boys?"

"Thanks, have a good trip. *Que le vaya bien.*"

The wagon was moving again, and for the better part of an hour the jolting continued unabated. Tom stopped then and opened the back, beckoning her out. On either side of the road stretched a papaya plantation, the slender trees with their tassels of leaves at the top looking top-heavy with great clusters of green fruit like small oblong watermelons. Tom picked three of them and put them in the wagon. "Ordinarily these would take several weeks to ripen when they are still on the trees, but these workers must be off on a tear, too. In a few days these will be ripe."

The country was very broken, and the track they followed made tortuous loops to avoid the worst ravines. In the late afternoon they crossed the Armeria River at a shallow ford that gave them no trouble, and the road followed the river for a way. "Why don't we camp here?" Ellen asked. "There's water, and we can get an early start tomorrow."

"There may be mosquitoes," Tom warned.

"Maybe not this time of year—there aren't on the river at Santa Cruz."

"Will you miss Santa Cruz?" he asked later, as they roasted the meat they'd bought and heated *tortillas*.

"Some things."

"Such as?"

"Oh, the view out over the valley toward those marvellous rock slab mountains. Lupita, Ofelia, Jorge. Riding

Luz through the green cane fields to Edmundo's. The wild flowers on the hills in October and those first wonderful rains when you can see everything turn green in front of your eyes and the thunderheads towering up over the mountains and the incredible sunsets with the clouds blazing in the dying light. The picnics we used to have up in the old avocado grove, and the cold pool up there in the rocky canyon where you could look up while you were floating on your back and see the cactus growing way up on the canyon lip. Yes, there are things I'll miss."

"What about California? What do you miss most there?"

"I couldn't even begin to tell you. It's softer, lusher land than this, at least where the ranch is, and things grow generously, not stingily. I told you about Coxo, the cove with the reef and the little silver fish. I wouldn't feel I was home now until I saw it again."

"That country is still home for you, isn't it?"

"I'll never find another. It's bad luck I didn't fall in love with Billy Morton instead of the exotic foreigner; I'd be where I could ride over to Coxo every day if I wanted to. We would build a house overlooking the ocean with a stone fireplace large enough to cook in, adobe walls a foot thick, and a red tile roof. In the night we would lie in bed and listen to the distant waves breaking on the beach below, and the lonely whistles of the trains." Her voice trailed off as she stared at the small fire and lost herself in the vision. She brought herself up with a start as she realized that it wasn't Billy Morton she was visualizing with her at all.

After dinner they washed the few dishes in the river and came back to the fire. She started to ask him about his grandfather's *hacienda* but stopped abruptly as he put a hand on her arm and looked past her shoulder. Slowly she turned around to see what he was looking at. The firelight flickered on the white clothes of the eight men standing

there, and on their cartridge belts and on their guns, a motley collection of ancient pistols and handmade muskets in which powder and shot were tamped down the barrel. They had *machetes* stuck in their sashes, hats of woven palm leaves that were smaller and less cumbersome than the great flamboyant *sombreros* of Jalisco, and red bandana neckerchiefs. Mustached and unshaven, their faces utterly impassive, they were as villainous-looking a crew as she'd seen, even including Manco's bunch. Oh no, she thought despairingly, to have come all this way only to fall into the hands of such as these. They'd have been better off with Manco.

Tom, still wearing his high collared shirt though not the long coat, jumped up and walked toward them with his hand outstretched. "Good evening, gentlemen, you are manna from heaven. We're on our way to Manzanillo to pick up a body they've got on ice for us there. This here's the little woman—wouldn't have brought her only it takes two to get this hearse up some of these cuts and I couldn't get anybody else in Colima to come. They're all scared to death of death, ha, ha. What's the road like ahead? Some *cabrón* in Colima told us this was an easier way since they blockaded the main road and blew the bridges. Say, could I hire a couple of you fellows to come along and help us out? The family's going to pay plenty when I get him back. Only son, you know." All this came out in a torrent of words that washed over the startled men, and judging from their expressions, was like to drown them. A few of them crossed themselves.

"Well?" Tom went on. "Who's coming with us? I'll pay ten pesos, the easiest ten pesos you ever made. Why, I was going to do it with just the little woman here, but she's *embarazada*, pregnant you know, and I don't like her exerting herself too much." Ellen saw that he had fallen into a kind of country patois, almost a different language, from the high Spanish he and Carlos habitually used.

The men muttered among themselves, then one spoke up. "You don't come from Colima," he said suspiciously.

"I can see you're clever ones all right," Tom replied, laughing easily. "We come from Guadalajara originally, but there is too much competition there, an undertaker in every block. So we came to Colima where we just about have the field to ourselves. Here, have my card. Never know when you might want someone in your family buried in style—*real* style, nothing like it short of Guadalajara. If you really love your departed ones, you'll have them buried in a genuine rosewood coffin with silver fittings, nothing better even in Mexico City. What do you say, fellows?" he wheedled. "Come on and help us out."

There were more mutterings, their eyes rolling whitely in their now alarmed faces. More of them crossed themselves. Suddenly they were no longer there—they didn't turn and walk off but rather simply disappeared like smoke into the surrounding darkness. Tom looked at Ellen and grinned. "Let me see that!" she said, snatching the card from his hand.

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"What if they'd read it?" she asked, horrified.

"It was a safe bet none of them could have read it if they'd wanted to. The banana and papaya plantations are hardly known for their schools."

"Of course. I keep forgetting that down here learning to read is a luxury."

"Were the people who lived at the crossroads near your father's ranch taught to read?"

She looked at him angrily. "You know they weren't. It seems to me we went through that once before."

"Well?"

She was silent, and they soon went to bed.

She woke as it was getting light and saw that Tom was

still asleep. She went out in his shirt she used as a nightgown and walked over to the river, shallow now at the height of the dry season. Walking down the stream, she came to a small natural waterfall that had hollowed out a pool beneath, and she went into the water shirt and all as the Mexican women did. With the piece of soap from the market in Colima, she soaped herself and the shirt both, watching the soap bubbles float away downstream and disappear under some willow branches trailing in the water. Above, there were small clouds lit a glowing pink from the rising sun, and she floated on her back watching them change from pink to white as the sun cleared the distant mountains and sent rays spiking through the palm leaves of a coconut plantation by the river.

A sudden sound made her glance at the bank.

"Dammit, don't ever go off like that!" Tom was angry.

She remained floating on her back. "Come on in, the water's wonderful."

"That's all we need, to be surprised splashing around in the river. I'll watch while you finish, and you can watch for me. Let's hope they don't steal the wagon while we're at it."

"Didn't sleep well?" she asked sympathetically. "Never mind, you couldn't *give* that wagon to those men. Did you see them crossing themselves?" She laughed and got out of the pool, conscious that the wet shirt clung to her. "Could I put on some clothes to guard you?"

He nodded, a reluctant smile tugging at his mouth. "Bring me some clean underwear, will you?"

When she returned, he was already playing in the water, standing on his head beneath the surface, his feet waving comically in the air, and turning somersaults underwater. While she waited for him, she washed the underwear he had taken off and what other dirty clothing she could find.

When he came out of the water, she was conscien-

tiously scrubbing the clothes and making a point of not looking up. As she thought, he was completely naked and just as unselfconscious about it. He sat down on a rock in the strengthening sun and lit a cigar. "If it weren't for visitors, I'd be happy to stay here for a few days," he said musingly.

She looked up in spite of herself. "You mean you're in no hurry to get to Manzanillo after all?"

"I didn't say that." His back was partially to her, and she couldn't see the expression on his face. "I might even come back this way on Adiós."

With an inner wrench she remembered that of course he would be coming back. The future once again loomed up before her, a grey featureless landscape that held not even the sure promise of returning to her father's ranch. A day or so would see them to Manzanillo, where he could leave her to wait for a ship to California. It seemed that all their lives they had been travelling, and she could not imagine a time when he would no longer be with her.

In the middle of the afternoon, after crossing several small ravines left by last year's flood waters at which they had had to harness an indignant Adiós and the mare as well, they came within sight of the road linking Barra de Navidad and the other coastal villages to Manzanillo. She got in the back of the wagon again, and Tom put on his long coat. They hadn't gone far when the wagon pulled up.

"I wouldn't try to get through right now," a strange voice said. "We have no orders to stop you, but Colorado is rampaging around Playa de Oro, and you're sure to lose at least your animals, corpse or no corpse."

"Do they stay in one place long?" Tom asked.

"Never. In a day or so they're just as likely to be up near Colima or over by Tecoman."

"I'll have to hope the embalming holds, then. I'll go

down by the ocean where it's cooler to wait it out. Thank you for the warning, corporal."

"At your orders, *señor*," this last said ironically.

The wagon turned and retraced their route, then turned off the road again, jolting harder, as they headed down a dirt track toward the ocean several miles away. Tom pulled up the mules and she climbed up beside him, feeling as if she had been given a reprieve.

"We could still try to get through if you wanted to take a chance," he said carefully. "Those soldiers wouldn't stop us, they said so."

"I don't think I want to," she said, also carefully.

"If we stay somewhere for a couple of days, you know what's going to happen, don't you? I'm not made of stone."

"Yes, I think so."

"There'll be no promises, no ties..." He flicked a persistent fly from the rump of the off mule, not looking at her.

"I know."

"All right, then." He clicked his tongue at the mules, and the wagon lurched forward.

CHAPTER XVIII

"We're only about five kilometers from the beach," he said after a silence.

"How do you know?"

"There was a beaten up wooden sign back there that said so. This place is called La Trinidad."

On either side of the road were open sunny papaya groves, the delicate long pale trunks topped by tufts of leaves and heavy clusters of foot-long green fruit, these groves alternating with shady coconut palm plantations with banana trees growing in the small splashes of sunlight between the palms. Here and there were piles of green coconuts apparently abandoned. They came to a tiny village with no one in sight, not a dog, not a pig, not a burro, not a child.

Tom jumped off the wagon. "Wait a minute. If I can find anybody, we can ask what the beach is like and if there's been trouble here lately."

She sat holding the reins, knowing that he would find no one; the village had an abandoned air that was unmis-

takable. In fifteen minutes he was back, having looked into a number of the stick and palm frond huts.

"They've all gone," he said unnecessarily. He held up a line on which had been tied five or six fish hooks. "These will come in handy. It's been a long time since I've had any fish."

The deserted village sitting there so unnaturally silent bothered both of them, and they were glad to leave. Once again they were in alternating papaya and coconut plantations. Tom stopped once and cut a stick of green bananas, and they stopped at another larger village as deserted as the other had been. In one place ran a shallow stream next to the road where they watered the animals. At last they crossed some open marshland, and beyond a thin final fringe of palms saw sand dunes. The track ran along the dunes for a short while and abruptly ended in a palm grove at a cluster of open-sided palm roofed shelters built by fishermen. A mound of emptied oyster shells gave off a sharp stench of rotting sea life. As they came up to the structures, they could suddenly see a wide blue cove studded along the near end with black rocks and pinnales rising up out of the clear water in fantastic shapes. The sand curved gently away from them in a great arc around to another rocky headland some two miles down the beach, waves breaking white in the blue water.

"It's beautiful," Ellen gasped, "the most beautiful beach I've ever seen!"

Almost at the other end of the cove they could see what seemed to be a palm frond hut with a roof of palm leaves extending out in front to make a shaded area. "There'll be gnats and mosquitoes here under these palm trees," Tom said. "Let's go see what that hut is all about."

A wagon track ran the full length of the cove and disappeared up over a hill whose broken face formed the far point. The hut proved as empty as the shelters they had left. In the late afternoon sunlight nothing moved but a

flock of sandpipers racing gracefully back and forth as the sea water advanced and receded, picking sand crabs from the gleaming beach. Over the largest pinnacle of rock out in the bay, some black frigate birds wheeled and turned and soared on their great swept-back wings.

"They say that those birds can never land," Tom said. "Once down, they can never become airborne again and must fly about forever."

On the side of the track opposite the sea, a long grassy bank descended into a thick growth of bushes with thorns and round shiny leaves. They unharnessed the mules and turned them loose hobbled along with the horses to graze. A flight of white herons sailed over the swampy growth, and Tom pointed out the track of a wildcat in the dirt near where the horses were grazing.

"Look, Tom, sharks!" Three pointed fins were appearing and disappearing in long lazy rolls a hundred yards offshore.

He laughed. "They're porpoises, Ellen—good luck."

They walked barefoot up the beach, splashing through the foam of spent waves, to the point, whose near side was piled high with driftwood polished silver by the sun and salt water. They staggered back with as much as they could carry, arriving breathless at the hut, where they lay down in the shelter of the palm frond porch to get their breath.

"Will we sleep in here tonight?" Ellen asked, delighted.

"No, we won't. Those palm fronds are probably full of scorpions. The spiders eat the gnats and mosquitoes, and the scorpions eat the spiders."

"How do you know so much about the coast?"

"From Mexico City we'd take the train to Veracruz when I was growing up and then go by carriage to a village north of there where there weren't so many sharks. Veracruz was famous for its sharks."

"Were the beaches as nice as this?"

"Not nearly. On the gulf there aren't many waves, and the sand is often grey. It's hotter, too. Judging from Mazatlan, though, I'm sure both coasts have the same gnats and mosquitoes and wildlife. On the way to California I used to lay over in Mazatlan for a couple of days at a time. There were a lot of pretty girls there," he said reminiscently.

"You would know, wouldn't you? Let's go swimming."

"Are you sure the waves aren't too big for you?"

She laughed happily. "Well, I can always paddle around in the shallow water, can't I?"

She had on Tom's shirt again, and he wore the close fitting cotton underwear that came down to his knees. As they approached the water's edge, he stopped and looked at her. "This is foolish, all these clothes. I'm damned if I'll swim in them." He took off his underwear and tossed it up on the dry sand. She stood there rooted, wishing she had the courage to take off the shirt. "You won't have anything to sleep in if you get that wet," he said gently, slowly and deliberately undoing the buttons and pushing the shirt back off her shoulders, his eyes never leaving hers. He touched her shoulder briefly as he had at Colima and turned and ran into the water, diving through a wave.

The spell broken, she ran after him, praying there were no rocks, but the sand under her feet was firmly rippled, the water so clear she could see reflections of sunlight on her feet when she was standing shoulder deep. A small frightened fish jumped in front of her just before she met the white lipped wave rising above her and dived through the cool greenness, the water like silk on her bare skin, to find Tom treading water on the other side, his wet hair in bangs across his forehead.

"I should've known you could swim like that," he laughed, "though how any woman learns to swim with all those clothes they have to wear, I wouldn't know."

"I didn't always wear them."

"Your father doesn't let you go swimming like this?" He sounded surprised.

She laughed again. "My father never saw me in any but the most demure of bathing costumes. Didn't you know, men may swim, but ladies bathe. It's like animals sweat, men perspire, and ladies glow. No, with Billy Morton when we were children I swam like this, and later on with cut down pants and undershirts."

"You never cease to amaze me. How did you stay virginal until Carlos came along?"

"How do you know I was?"

"I know Carlos—he'd never have married anything but a virgin. What was the matter with your Billy Morton?"

"We just never did anything like that. We never even kissed. He had a crush on Rosemary Wightman, but she couldn't swim, so for the swimming he was stuck with Manuel and me. If it'd been Rosemary Wightman riding waves with him, things might have been different."

"He was a fool."

She floated easily. "No," she said thoughtfully, "he wasn't. I've been a misfit ever since I can remember. Nice girls don't go swimming in cut-off pants and undershirts. They certainly don't go bathing without any clothes at all. They don't marry foreigners, they don't travel alone with men other than their husbands, and they don't give themselves before marriage." He raised his eyebrows at that last. "They don't talk like this, either. I was brought up by a Mexican cook and a bunch of cowhands. I don't know how to act like a nice woman, and from what I've seen of them in California as well as here, I don't want to know. Juanita is the only woman I've met down here outside of servants that I'd give two cents for, and she's what most people would call a whore. As far as that goes, I guess they'd call me one, too. No, there could be nothing between Billy Morton and me—he knew too much about me."

"And Carlos, how much did he know?"

"Very little. I kept trying to tell him, but he wouldn't listen."

Ellen swam further in to where she could stand up, and as a wave rose behind her, she went with it and rode down a steep powerful slide that foamed about her, bumping and thrusting her along until it finally deposited her gently in shallow water, its force spent. When she stood up and turned around to go back out for another one, she could see Tom out beyond the wave line watching her.

That night a brilliant half moon tipped the breaking waves with cold light, and they walked a long way down the beach, enjoying the feel of the air that was warm and soft as milk. It was as if they had stepped from the hot, dust-blown violence of Mexico into another world they had all to themselves. All their caution was spent; they assumed with no real reason that they would be safe as long as they were here because it had to be that way. They spoke deliberately of prosaic things, avoiding personal revelations. Ellen didn't know what Tom was thinking, but she herself felt self-conscious with him for the first time, and it made her nervous.

When they returned to the fire, he took her by the hand and drew her after him up to the wagon where he removed a blanket from one of the bunks. He led her back down to the beach again, never letting go her hand, and spread the blanket on the sand. She was afraid if she tried to say anything her teeth would chatter with nervousness, so she stood there stiff and unspeaking. He put a hand on her arm, and she started under his touch.

"Relax, love, we've all the time in the world," he told her gently. "You're going to sit down and I'm going to sit down and we're going to have a cigar and a drink. Then we'll see. If we don't both feel like it tonight, we'll just wait and see, and perhaps tomorrow the mood will strike both of us, or the next day, or never."

She sat down thankfully, the tension in her easing. "I thought you said you weren't made of stone."

"I'm not. But I'm not silly enough either to waste my efforts where they're not wanted." He lit a cigar and handed her a tin cup of mescal and water.

"What was it like when you were a child?" she asked, changing the subject. "You know a lot about me and I know very little about you except that you hated your grandfather and never felt you belonged. What were your mother and father like?"

He leaned back on his elbows watching the waves breaking in the moonlight. "I loved my father," he said simply. "He didn't look anything like me. He was well over six feet and had a red beard and laughed a lot. I guess I've got his eyes. When he was sent out to inspect mine sites, he used to take me with him sometimes. We'd always ride up in the locomotive of the train—I think he knew every engineer in Mexico. Can you imagine how wonderful that was for a boy, the fireman shovelling coal for all he was worth and the engineer leaning out the window and blowing that great lonely whistle that made the horses shy and the cows run away with their tails in the air? My father would hold me while I leaned out the window, too, and I still sometimes dream that I can feel his hands on my waist and the wind in my face as I watch the fields and valleys and deserts and gorges go flying by.

"The dream ends there, but in reality, when he decided to get off he would leave me with some money and tell the engineer to let me off at the next station and see that someone put me on the next train for Mexico City. Going back, I'd have to ride in a passenger car, and I always felt too much like crying to notice the scenery that had me all excited going the other way."

"What a terrible thing to do to a child! Why would he leave you?"

"Usually because it was a place he wanted to get drunk

in, or gamble, or he had a woman stashed there. He'd send me on to the next stations so he wouldn't get his lives mixed up. I never told him how I felt about being left like that because I knew if I did he would never take me with him again, and I couldn't have stood that."

"How did your mother feel about it? I'm surprised she let him take you if he was going to abandon you."

"She didn't care very much finally, even about his abandoning her, and I think at first it was only her pride. She really didn't care very much for me. Before I was born, she used to go with him where his work was. The mining towns were desolate, godforsaken places full of hungry men, no place for a woman, least of all a woman with a child. My brother Raúl was seven, and according to my mother everything I wasn't. He was gentle and well mannered and improbably blond. You must know by now that we Mexicans may instinctively hate *gringos*, but we yearn for their fairness. In San Luis Potosi, Raúl caught typhoid fever and died, and she never forgave my father for it. I was what is known as a consolation baby. I never thought about it until I was grown, but after Raúl's birth she may have banned my father from her bed even then, because he and I were the only two children she ever had. From the time I can remember, she and my father had separate bedrooms and only spoke to each other out of necessity. I used to sneak into the library to get books that she would never have allowed a ten year old child to read, and one night I heard them arguing after they thought I'd gone to sleep. He'd gotten a little drunk and was doing his best to seduce her.

"My mother was saying, 'And leave me here with another baby? Never. You could have had that job my father set up for you in Mexico City, but you wouldn't take it. Well then, go off to your dirty mining camps and your dirty women, Tomás—I'll have no part of it.'"

"No, I wouldn't be your father's pet poodle and I never

will,' he answered her: 'Tomorrow morning I'm leaving for Nacozari, Alejandra. Let's make a new start. You and Tom and I can be a family once more, wouldn't you like that? Think about it, Alex, how it would be to be together again.'

"I remember what it was like, all right. I had Raúl in a mining camp in a desert out at the end of the world. I was stupid enough when he died to have another child in the middle of nowhere, and only a midwife with dirty bands to help me because the mine doctor was too drunk to stand up. The heat and the dust and the flies and the vultures were enough to send anyone with sense mad. I know all about your Nacozari even though I've never seen it. I can tell you about the sun and the wind and the blowing sand and the lack of water—I know it all.'

"You accuse me of going with dirty women, Alejandra, but their hands are cleaner and more generous than yours. A man can't go for years with no loving, it isn't natural. You always thought love was dirty, didn't you? It was a messy smelly nuisance that you put up with—sometimes. If I go alone this time, I won't be back ever, except to see Tom once in a while.'

"Is that so new?" she asked.

"Before that," Tom said, "it used to be my father would stay for weeks when he came and take me hunting with him and take both of us down to Veracruz to the beach. Afterward I never saw him except for those abortive train trips when he'd try to behave in front of me as long as he could, but then the hunger for drink would take hold of him and he'd have to go."

"What happened to him?"

"He was stabbed in a bar fight, which only saved him from dying of the drink later on." He smiled sadly. "It wasn't even his fight."

Ellen thought of the bewildered child caught between two people like that, and she took his hand. "It doesn't

always have to be that way," she offered. "They had very bad luck."

"Your parents were better, I take it?" His tone was bitter.

"My father loved my mother so much he never remarried all those years after she died."

"She's been dead a long time?"

"Since I was born. I never knew her."

"Then how do you know how they were together?" he asked rudely.

"I'm not going to fight with you, Tom. I fought with Carlos and I'm sorry for it. I'm not going to fight with anyone ever again."

He was lying on his back looking up at the sky. He put his arm around her as she sat and gently drew her down to him. He kissed her slowly, holding her head in both his hands. He unbuttoned her shirt and lay his head between her breasts, and she stroked his hair and traced the line of an eyebrow with her finger. He kissed her again, his mouth more insistent this time. They felt each other's bodies smooth and close and warm, beginning to beat with a pulse of awareness that quickened them, every nerve end feeling, seeking, wanting. With his mouth and large clever hands and even for a time his words, he made love to her in earnest then, and at first slowly and finally running he brought her with him into a far country where she had never been before, where there was no fear, no pain, no sorrow, nor any shame.

"Can you, love? Can you now!" he cried at last, and like the burning wheel at the *castillo's* top they went soaring off up, up into the dark sky behind their eyelids, showering flaming sparks of fire until the final explosion of incandescence that left them clinging together shattered and spent.

After a long silence in which their breathing evened and slowed, "Heighho, says Rowley!" she murmured.

He looked at her startled, and they both burst into laughter. "As I said before," he remarked, "your Billy Morton is a fool."

She laughed again, and they lay side by side watching the moon slide down the sky until the growing chill finally drove them into the wagon where they fell asleep in each other's arms.

Later when she tried to remember those days, she could bring to mind only pieces, and some of those scrambled in time. There was Tom walking back up the beach with three fish he'd caught with bait from the little rock crabs that ran sideways with incredible speed on their delicate legs into a crevice to hide. They tried to catch the little ghost crabs, flickering translucent shadows, that skittered over the sand, but they could dig faster than any human, and until Tom tried throwing sand at them, confusing them into immobility, they would disappear for good down a nearby hole, not to be found again. The hermit crabs were so droll that they hadn't the heart to use them for bait; in their borrowed shells they toddled along, leaving a wonderfully complicated track behind them in the sand.

Was it the same day they rode the horses bareback into the ocean that she and Tom went diving for oysters but found they were all but impossible to distinguish from the crusted rocks they lived on? When was it they saw the long silver fish dancing on its tail for several hundred yards across the blue water? What day was it they saw the three small bat-like rays go leaping joyously down the whole length of the bay, putting up a spray of white water each time they landed? How long after they got there did she sit in the shade of the porch with Tom's head on her lap watching the mast and part of the hull of a ship, so far away it was half lost below the curve of the earth, looking as big as the world in the false shimmering band of heat and moisture-laden air where the sky met the water? Occasionally after that they saw other ships that came and

went from the harbor channel of Manzanillo, a continual reminder of another world waiting for them out there.

There was the day she took the horses and mules over the hill to the river as they did twice daily and found the treasury of shells where the river emptied in a long channel into the sea. When the tide was high, the river ran backward into the mangrove swamps buzzing with mosquitoes and alive with the raucous cries of unseen birds. As the tide came in, it brought with it shells of all kinds and deposited them on the sand of the shallow channel. There were little spiraled horns she called unicorns' horns and conchs and Venus combs and sand dollars and iridescent oyster shells and a myriad of others she could put no name to. She forgot the time and left the animals to crop grass beside the river while she gathered the bright shells with their curiously wrought shapes and designs.

"What the devil have you been doing, Ellen? I thought you might be in trouble." Tom's voice was angry and alarmed.

"Oh Tom, look at these—and these! I never knew shells like these existed. See, I gathered them to take back for you, they're a love present from me to you."

He waded out and took her in his arms, all wet as she was, and held her tight. "They make a glorious present, Ellen, and I thank you, but we weren't going to talk of love, remember? I cherish you, I mean to pleasure you, I want to protect you, and I just plain want you, but I haven't it in me to love."

The brightness of the day seemed to darken. "I have it in me to love, Tom, but I won't let myself. I know that when we come to Manzanillo we'll have to say goodbye, and I can't bear to lose any more I love. I lost my husband and my unborn child and yes, Edmundo too, and I can't stand to have it happen again..."

"You were in love with Edmundo?" he asked incredulously.

"No, not in love, but I loved him. The thought came to

me more than once that had it been Edmundo I'd fallen in love with and married, a lot of things might have been different." She raised calm green eyes to meet his blue ones. "But then it would have been me and not Lety sprawled out all bloody on that river bank, wouldn't it?" She disengaged herself gently from his embrace and waded ashore to catch up the animals, leaving him standing there in the channel, the imprint of her wet body still on his shirt and a multitude of brilliant shells glittering in the sand about his feet.

They talked often of what they had seen and done and read. They described food they had relished and places they had been. She told him about Pasadena and the school and crashing the Hunt Club Ball. He told her about playing rugby and sailing in the icy wind of San Francisco Bay, and how a teacher he'd had had given him a whole new world of literature in the English language.

"His name was Handman," he said as they sat over the dying fire. "He was a bitter man, and I think he must have recognized the bitterness in me."

"I thought you were taking agricultural courses."

"I was, but you could take other things as well. Two or three years ago Carlos told me they opened a separate agricultural college near Sacramento, but when I went there Berkeley was just about all of it. I almost switched to being a literature major before I realized I'd never fit up there and I should stick to horses and cows instead."

"Tom?"

"Hmm?"

"Are you planning on being bitter all your life?"

"I didn't ever plan on being bitter at all."

"Yes, but you're hugging it to you now you've got it, aren't you? You're going to end up a sour crotchety old man with bad breath."

"Shut up," and he stopped her mouth with his. "I'm going to be a lecherous old man, didn't you know," he said

against her neck, "and when I'm in my last illness I'm going to be like King David and have virgins warm me in my bed." He kissed her again.

"That lets me out, doesn't it?" she laughed.

"Oh, you'll still be going strong and have a coterie of lusty young men to keep you satisfied."

"And where will we be when all this is going on?"

"Let's see, you'll have taken the Rajah of Mahore as your sixth husband, and I'll be in Tahiti with several wives and all kinds of concubines."

"Why, you men certainly are boastful. How would you take care of so many women? It ought to be the other way around, you know—harems should be made up of men, not women."

"That's all you know. This is how I would take care of them—and this and this..."

One late afternoon clouds began to pile up and the sun sank behind a great towering unseasonal thunderhead with fiery edges that cast a huge shadow across the bay. The herons and pelicans flew in their evening formations to their roosting places early, and the little sand pipers and curlews and terns disappeared from the beach. Warned, Tom and Ellen ate early and were just finishing when a raucous gust of wind hit them and they could feel the first warm spatters of rain. As they ran up toward the wagon, they saw a long flickering finger of lightning followed by a drumming of thunder. They lay side by side in the dark, listening to the heavy splashing of rain on the roof.

"O Western Wind..." he murmured.

"What's that?"

"O Western Wind

When wilt thou blow,

That the small rain down can rain?

Christ, that my love were in my arms

And I in my bed again."

"Who wrote that?" she asked, moved by its longing.

"No one knows—an anonymous lonely lover in the middle ages."

Long after he was asleep she lay awake thinking out the man who wrote that, wondering exactly how it had been with him all those centuries ago.

"You know, I'll bet there're lobsters along that reef," Tom said one morning. "I'm getting tired of fish."

"What would we cook them in even if we found any?"

"I saw a big pot when I was looking through the village the first day we came. Let's ride over and get it. With any luck we'll find some kind of net as well."

They rode the horses to the village once again, and went through every hut. They found none of the big nets, but they did find one of the small ones that the fishermen used in lagoons, standing in water to their waists and tossing out the small weighted circle with a deft throw that trapped the fish as the weights came together in the water. The pot was large and heavy, and though Ellen was skeptical, he tied it to his saddle. As he swung up on *Adiós*, his foot hit the pot with a clang, shoving it against the stallion's side. *Adiós* gave a startled protesting snort and began to buck earnestly, catching Tom with only one foot in the stirrup. The contest was unequal from the start, and as Tom was thrown high and wide, the frightened horse took off toward the beach with the kettle banging against his side.

Ellen knew that her mare could never catch him and that her only hope was to take a shortcut through the marsh that she didn't even know was passable. She might even lose the mare as well. Without hesitating, however, she took off after him. If he passed their wagon, he could spook the mules, and if they broke their hobbles and the three of them went on, they would end up at the broken wooden bridge at the river. On the other side of the river

the track continued and became a maze of tracks through scrub trees and heavy undergrowth. The prospect of a trip on foot to Manzanillo dismayed her. With the wagon they had protective coloring, for there were still many fair, blue-eyed families of *gachupin*—Spanish—origin. But on foot with their familiar accents from another part of the country, they would be spotted immediately as refugee *gringos*, fair game for any passing band of renegades. To have come so far only to be undone by a silly accident seemed cruelly unfair.

She had noticed a track that led across the marsh and into the swamp, and she hoped that it wouldn't simply give out, leaving her in an impossible cul-de-sac. The marsh was easy going, the water so low that she could see the mud, but as they came to the swamp, the water suddenly deepened and the mare had to plunge forward in great leaps. Though Ellen had to duck often, the thorn trees had obviously been cut to clear a way. Singing clouds of mosquitoes boiled up around them and twice they flushed birds she couldn't see, only hear their whirring wings and strange cries. As abruptly as it began, the water ceased, and she found herself in a maze of tracks in the sandy soil, probably made by herds of goats. She pulled up the mare for a moment and over the horse's heavy breathing and her own heart beats could just make out the whisper of waves on an unseen beach. She took the track leading in that direction, and soon they were struggling up the grassy slope to the road, where the stallion's galloping hoofbeats could be heard, though it was hard to tell at first if he were coming toward them or had already passed them.

The hoofbeats grew louder, though, and for the first time she allowed herself to think they were in time. As they came up on the road with a final lunge, she could see him coming toward her, head up, eyes wild, the kettle

thumping his side at every stride. She forced the tired mare into a run toward the wagon a half mile away and waited for Adiós to overtake them as he surely would. She could hear the whistle of his breath even over the drumming hoofs of both horses, and then his head was past the mare's hindquarters and up to Ellen's knee. She reached out and grasped the rawhide reins still looped over his neck and gradually slowed the mare, talking soothingly to Adiós. The presence of the mare probably soothing him more than her talking, the stallion stopped fighting the bit and obediently dropped to a trot when the mare did, then to a walk and a halt. While still mounted, Ellen reached over with the knife she always carried since Chirlo's assault and cut the saddle strings, allowing the kettle to fall to the ground with a clang that sent Adiós crowding into the mare in fright.

Leaving the kettle where it lay, Ellen led Adiós at a walk back the way he had come. Both horses were dripping wet, and they were glad to take their time. They turned at the palm grove and headed inland through the marsh toward the village. By the time they came to the place where the stream neared the road, the sweat had dried, leaving the horses' coats in stiff curls. She let them walk down to the stream to drink as Tom appeared, walking. Ellen had a sudden feeling of compunction that she hadn't turned the mare over to him and let him make the chase. On the other hand, the mare might have been slowed by his heavier weight. Two years' experience with Carlos's pride had taught her to expect that Tom would be furious.

As he approached, he said without expression, "You caught him." Totally unexpectedly then he grinned. "Good for you. I've done some damned fool things in my life, but few of them to equal that." He took Adiós's reins from her hand.

"I thought you'd be angry."

"Lady, I'm so glad to see that horse I couldn't be mad at anybody, least of all you. You cut through the swamp?" She nodded.

"Now that was a damned fool thing to do, too—but I'm glad you did or we'd have been on foot or riding double on that poor little mare of yours. She couldn't have pulled the wagon back to the main road, let alone to Manzanillo."

He mounted Adiós as he always did, giving an easy jump to put his foot in the stirrup and easing his other leg neatly over until he was seated in the saddle. They rode back in a companionable silence until they could see the kettle lying in the road.

"You came up to the road over there?" he asked.

She nodded again. "Do you still want to try for lobsters?"

He pulled two grimy work gloves from his rear pocket and waved them at her. "It would be a shame to waste all that effort, wouldn't it?"

After lunch they walked down to the palm grove end of the beach, collecting driftwood of the right length and dragging the pieces behind them on a rope. At the end, they bound the buoyant lengths of wood together to make a rough raft, and launched it in the quiet water of the protected end of the cove, where it bobbed and dipped with the tiny waves little more than ripples.

"It's plenty good enough to tie the catch to," Tom said.

They stripped completely unselfconsciously and waded out to the raft. Each of them had a glove on one hand and a short iron bar in the other to force the lobsters out far enough to grab their feelers with the gloved hand. Kicking, they pushed the raft out along the irregular spine of rocks extending off the headland. Tom went down first, and she could see him prodding under ledges with his bar, then a flurry of kicking and bubbles as he shot to the surface triumphantly holding a large lobster that was

snapping its tail angrily. It was her turn next, and she upended and went down in a cloud of bubbles among a school of tiny electric blue fish that scattered panicked at the arrival of this alien monster among them. With the bar she swept under a shadowy ledge of rock and coral, pushing the lobster partway out in the open. Grabbing him quickly in the middle of his back, she shot up toward the surface, which seemed from below a translucent green sheet flecked with ripples of blue sky reflections above her. She burst out into the sweet air with a gasping intake of breath.

The next time it was her turn, she had only just gotten down when Tom followed her and pointed above. The sunlight filtering through the green world around them darkened, and he put a calming hand on her arm as she looked up to see a great black manta ray flapping majestically over their heads, its fifteen-foot wingspread making it look huge. Her heart lurched fearfully for a moment, but Tom squeezed her arm reassuringly just before her need for air sent her to the surface not ten feet behind the great creature that ignored her entirely. She clung to the raft and watched the large wings power the huge dark shape with fluid grace through the crystal greenness of the water. She could see his shadow sliding over the shallow rock and coral peaks beyond where they had been taking the lobsters, then flitting down across the much deeper white sand between. The ray flapped lazily out of sight, and, excitedly she turned to Tom who was holding onto the raft beside her. They both laughed happily, and she tasted the salt water on his mouth as he kissed her.

When they waded ashore, pulling the raft up onto dry sand where the tide wouldn't take it, each one took a side of the net's cargo of four lobsters. That night they had a feast, eating the lobster boiled in sea water with only a tomato and onion salsa Ellen made. They ate until they could hold no more, then took a long walk down the

beach. Danger seemed a long way away, Ellen thought as they walked down toward the water. She had noticed when they were diving long streamers of yellowish foam in the water that by sundown had formed foamy scallops at the tide line up and down the beach. As they came away from the fire, the moon hadn't yet risen, and they were startled by a brilliant burst of green fire as the first wave broke.

"Phosphorescence!" Ellen shouted happily. "I should have guessed, only in California the water turns red first, not yellow."

They ran down the beach where the water had been, and their footprints were outlined in sparkles of cold light. In silent agreement they stripped and plunged into the sea. Beyond the wave line, the movement of their feet and hands gave off ghostly swirls of green light as they disturbed the water. Like children they laughed and exclaimed, playing exuberantly in the luminous ocean.

"Look, there's the moon," Tom said, pointing.

A great bloated disk, reddened by April dust and the smoke of a fire somewhere, came edging up over the cliffs of the cove. They stood in awe as the oversized moon in what seemed an incredibly short time cleared the rocks entirely and turned gold, then white, shrinking to its normal size as it rose above the murky atmosphere.

"Surely they're not burning off land for cornfields when even the villages are deserted," she said.

"More likely it's some village itself that's burning," he replied grimly. "Impossible to say how far off."

They returned to their play, but the fun was out of it now. He turned her to him and kissed her, their bodies feeling cool and smooth in the water. "We can't stay here forever, you know." He pushed her wet hair gently back off her forehead.

"I know, but only a few days more? It's the last time we'll have."

"All right, love. God knows I want it as much as you do."

He lifted her in his arms and carried her up on the beach, where they made love amid the sparkles on the wet sand. Later after she had dried her hair somewhat over the fire, he put it out for the first time since they had been there. Usually they let it go out by itself, the coals glowing at them in a friendly way as they walked up to the wagon.

When they woke in the morning, it was to a strong smell that she couldn't at first identify. Then she laughed. "It's the phosphorescence. I'd forgotten how strong it smells after you've been swimming in it. We'd both better take the horses to the river this morning."

While the animals grazed after drinking, Tom and Ellen bathed in the clear water that was flowing out now toward the sea, even soaping themselves. They lay on the bank sunning afterward, lazily watching the palm fronds across the tidal channel waving gently in a little breeze from the south that brought a faint taste of smoke with it.

"We'll have to go sooner than we thought, love. They're coming nearer. Those villagers knew better than we when to leave."

"I know," she answered sadly, sitting up and looking at him as he lay with closed eyes, savoring the final moments. "Tom, I—I'd go to Nacozari with you—"

"Hush, love." He put his hand on her mouth. "There can never be Nacozari for us, you know that—or Trinidad, either. Don't let's spoil it now."

She shrugged hopelessly. "As you say, love is not for us."

He sat up and took her by the shoulders. "Are you worried about having a child?"

"I hadn't even thought about it," she said truthfully; it was a possibility that hadn't occurred to her.

"You should—I have. If you've conceived, you have only to send for me and I'll marry you to give the child a name."

"And then go off again I suppose," she replied bitterly. "You'll give the child a name, but who will give him a father? Or me a husband? No, thank you. I'll tell everyone it's Carlos's. They don't know how long ago he died or even that I lost the other baby."

"So what I might want doesn't matter?"

"You yourself said so. You want to be a lover and an absent father without being a husband. No, I won't have it. I've served my apprenticeship as a Mexican wife, and at least that one was with a man who in his way loved me, but I want no more of it. I know, marrying me as I sail off to California isn't much of a sacrifice since you never wanted to marry anyone to live with anyway. You're as selfish in all this as you were when you fired that gun at the circus."

"What are you talking about? What gun?"

"What gun indeed! Don't play the innocent with me, Tom. The one thing we've always had and the only thing that made this last week possible was our honesty."

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said coldly.

"The gun that killed Manco's woman and wounded him, the gun that set off the shooting match that killed Carlos and César. *That* gun."

"Why you little fool, you mean that all this time you've been going around thinking I did that? It was one of Negrito's men, that's why he was tortured and hung. My God, I could have made a better shot than that if I'd been trying for Negrito. I had a place all set up in town, only they didn't come that way, or I'd have gotten him at that and saved him a far uglier death."

She looked at him with large eyes. "I seem to keep on being wrong about a lot of things."

"You do seem to make a practice of giving me credit for the most damnable acts, and yet you'd still make love to me. I don't understand you. You even thought I set Manco's men on you." His tone was cold.

"Forget all that," she said lamely. "Let's just say I made love to you because you were there and I had the need. It's the present and future I'm talking about now. You've made your feelings about loving anyone abundantly clear. I can't see why we're having this argument over a child you don't want from a mother you don't want. Cheer up, it took me two years to conceive with Carlos and there's every chance there won't be a child anyway. You can go off about your business without another thought."

She got up, dressed, and gathered up the horses and mules. They mounted the horses bareback and rode back to the wagon in grim silence. As they came down the final piece of road to the cove, Tom pulled up and pointed. A double line of footsteps was imprinted clearly in the sand, the morning sun outlining each one in shadow. The footsteps began at the cliff they were now descending, went up to the wagon, and retraced the route, disappearing up the face of the hill as the man whoever he was deliberately avoided using the track.

"Let's hope he was a stray fisherman or a villager fleeing from the south." Tom sounded worried. "If not, we'll have the whole pack of them on us in no time. What was his name? Colorado? We were lucky not to have been taken at the river."

They harnessed the mules and drove the wagon with the horses hitched behind. She watched the bay as they left, trying to imprint every detail on her mind. As if to tease them, the morning was bright and sparkled on the blue water with its black rock pinnacles and soaring frigate birds. The waves broke white on the clean sand crescent of the beach, and offshore she could see four or five porpoises rolling gracefully through the water in a kind of farewell salute. The tears that brimmed over and ran down her face surprised her as much as they did Tom, who happened to glance at her.

He wiped one from her cheek with a gentle finger. "You're not the only one who feels like crying, love. Never mind, you'll be going home."

"Oh Tom, you can be so tender and funny and gentle when you want to, why do you have to be so hard with it all?"

"So I won't break, love. Why else is anyone hard?"

They plodded through the coconut palm and papaya plantations, through the empty villages, and at last came out on the road, both of them buried in their thoughts. When they came to the place where they had been stopped, they saw that the soldiers were gone. Had they fled, been killed, or gone back to Manzanillo? They drove on through country as deserted and still as a country of the dead. They passed a burned-out village at the side of the road, but there were no bodies, no one in sight.

When the band of peons materialized like white shadows from the coconut palms on either side of the road, it was as if people from the spirit world had suddenly appeared. Tom pulled up on the mules and shrugged his shoulders under the unaccustomed weight of the claw-hammer coat across his back. "Damn," he muttered under his breath.

These men differed from Manco's people in that most of them weren't mounted. All the more reason for them to covet their horses tied behind the wagon. Somehow it didn't look as if this was going to go as smoothly as the encounter by the river on the way from Colima. One of the two mounted men came forward on a thin, ewe-necked bay that had seen better days. He wore a bright red shirt, and they knew that they were face to face with Colorado at last.

"We've been waiting for you," he said almost conversationally, his rifle resting across the pommel of his saddle.

CHAPTER XIX

"Ah," said Tom, a wealth of sympathy in his voice. "Is it a close relative, or a friend perhaps? I happen to carry some of my embalming supplies with me, but we'll have to make a coffin. There was an unexpected drain due to a carriage accident in Colima last week."

Colorado smiled, a beautiful smile that lit his whole face. He was far younger than Manco or Negrito, and very Indian-looking with his high cheekbones, almond eyes, and mahogany coloring. He should have been clothed in brilliant plumes and carrying a war shield and spear, Ellen thought. "No," he said, "no one had died—or rather, many have died, but it is for God to bury them. We need not trouble you for embalming, only for the loan of your animals."

"Surely, gentlemen," Tom answered reasonably, "you can see that without the animals you have put me out of business. I am not a *hacendado*, you are only stealing from your own when you rob me."

Colorado's face hardened. "No, you are not a *hacen-*

dado, are you, but you are the next thing to it. You batten on my people's religious beliefs to put them in debt forever with coffins and grave stones they do not need. We are born of the earth and there is nothing wrong with returning to the earth, but you and the vermin like you say, 'Oh, if you really loved your mother you wouldn't lay her naked in the cold ground. You must buy a special shroud for her and a hardwood coffin with silver handles and a mass for her soul and candles for her mass and a fancy stone to tell all who she was.'"

He spat on the ground. "You and the priests have picked my people clean, and we will have no more of it."

"Very well," Tom replied calmly, "you are entitled to your opinion. I can see there is no arguing with you. That means the wagon stays as well, I suppose. What are you going to do with us?"

"Do not be nervous, man of the dead, we will not kill you if that is what you're thinking, though by rights we should. We will not harm your woman, either, though that also by rights we should do, but I do not approve of unchaste behavior. No, instead we will strip you naked, and your woman with you, and turn you loose to go where you will, back to Colima or to Manzanillo as you wish."

"Will you leave us our shoes at least?" Tom asked.

"No, we will not. You will leave as God made you and survive if he wills it."

"Then you may as well kill us yourselves because we will surely die anyway."

"That is in the hands of God."

Tom's expression grew agonized. "You can't do that," he cried out, his voice breaking now. "Look," he said craftily, "take what you want. The wagon, the horses, all of it. Take her, too, if you like." He indicated Ellen with his chin.

Colorado's face settled into a look of contempt. "We already have the wagon and the animals, we do not need

to save you for that. We do not want your woman. We are not animals anymore, we are free men."

To Ellen's horror, Tom fell on his knees and began to cry. "I've seen what happens to people turned loose like this. For God's sake don't do this thing!"

He grabbed Colorado's arm, trying to hold his hand imploringly. Colorado jerked away and gave him a cuff on the ear that sent him sprawling. "Be a man," he snarled. "Where is your pride?"

As Ellen watched all this in horrified fascination, Colorado motioned to two men who came up to them and carefully undressed their unresisting victims. Tom was still sobbing. She realized that they were being careful not to damage the clothes, which they hoped to have for themselves. With an effort she refrained from trying to cover herself and instead stood straight and tall beside Tom, who took her hand in his briefly while he wept. "Your woman has more *cojones* than you," Colorado said shortly. Without another word they were started off down the road, and in the first few yards she understood what Tom had meant by saying they might as well have killed them, for the stones were already bruising her feet.

"You made a perfectly disgusting spectacle of yourself," she said when they were out of sight. "You might at least have made a fight of it—I'd have helped you."

"With what?" he asked calmly, the tears miraculously gone. "If I'd reached for my pistol, we'd both be dead now, and if I'd acted brave, they'd have watched us well on our way. I just hope that puritanical streak in him doesn't run too deep."

The changes in him were almost too bewildering for her to keep track of. "Why? I have to suppose it kept me from being raped to death."

"Our only chance is that trap I left for them in the wagon. If it doesn't work, my love, it'll be a long road to Manzanillo."

"Were those boxes you put on at Colima explosives?" she asked incredulously. "You still might not get all of them."

"Better than explosives, my dear, if they work. There are exactly fifty liters of pure cane alcohol, something like 150 proof, plus the part of the bottle of mescal we didn't drink. There are only thirty-six of them, I counted, so that should be enough and to spare."

She stared at him in dawning admiration. "What if they don't all get drunk?"

"I've seen damned few poor Mexican males who won't get drunk if given the chance. If I had their life, I would, too. Even if a couple don't, I think I can take care of them if I can catch them unawares."

They had gone around two bends now, and Ellen's feet were becoming more tender by the moment. "How are we going to circle back?" She looked with dismay at the trashy jungle floor of heavy green undergrowth, dead palm fronds, and old coconut husks beneath the palm trees. "We'd die of scorpions or snakes before we got fifty yards. I wouldn't walk in there even with boots on."

"We don't have to circle back," he explained patiently. "We'll sit down under a tree here and wait for a couple of hours and then go back far enough to see if anything's happened. Even if it hasn't, after they go to sleep I'm going to have a try at getting the horses back at least."

Unbelievably she saw him carefully open up a red bandana he had clutched wadded up in his hand ostensibly to wipe his eyes, and extract a cigar and a box of matches. He carefully lighted it and handed it to her. "A puff, love? The smoke will help to discourage the insect life in these palms." As they settled down in the shade at the side of the road, she was still laughing.

"What will you do after you see me off in Manzanillo," she asked him. "That is, if we get to Manzanillo?"

"I guess I'll go back to the *hacienda*. I never liked

Salvador very much, and I know the feeling was mutual. He thought I was a bad influence on Carlos, but he may be very happy to have someone who knows what he's doing run Santa Cruz and the sugar mill operation. I wouldn't be surprised if he tried to sell both, now that the local outlaws are temporarily set back. In that case, the new owner might be interested in using me."

"Don't you want a place of your own? You said you had some money from your father."

"This is no time to become a *hacendado* here. When the revolution is over, if it's ever over, then I'll probably buy a spread of my own, but meanwhile you wouldn't believe how kind I'll be to the workers. This time they can cut off their burros' feet and beat their wives to death for all of me."

"You say that now, Tom, but I don't think that's what you'll do the first mutilated animal you see. I'm afraid for you."

"Are you now?" His mouth curved in a strange smile. "You'll be in California, love, not giving a thought to me."

"Don't, Tom. Let's be friends at least. We may be dead tomorrow."

They finished the cigar and actually dozed off a little in the head of the day, even propped up as they were against the trunk of a palm. At last Tom squinted up at the sun that was well on its way down the arc of the sky. "Time to go."

As he said it, they heard the distant popping of gunfire. He settled back. "Give them another half hour. If it's the soldiers, that will give them time to finish it, and if they're shooting each other, that's that many less we have to worry about."

"You're the callous one, aren't you?"

"Not callous, no, just realistic. You can't really say this is like stabbing a man in the back, now can you?"

"All right, I'm sorry. I can't help thinking of those

miserable dirt-floored houses they live in on the *haciendas*, and those are better by far than those stick huts in a place swarming with mosquitoes and snakes and scorpions. When it rains, they must live in the mud."

"Spare me. I may well have to try to kill a few of them soon, and you'll make me too sorry for them to do it."

The second time they stood up to go, there were no more sounds from up the road. Gingerly they made their way back, their feet even more sore after their rest. After the second bend, Tom went ahead, flitting from tree to tree silently. He motioned her to stay back, but she came on after him, determined to try to help him if she could. The first thing they saw was the wagon, tilted unnaturally forward on its shafts as they had left it. Scattered around were nine or ten men lying on the ground as if asleep. Three of them in truth were asleep, but the other seven were wounded or dead. They came on Colorado almost last, a great ugly hole blown through his red shirt and chest by one of the homemade muskets.

"He tried to stop them," Tom said a little sadly. "I didn't think he'd be fool enough to try it once they were drunk. I'm afraid they took the horses and mules, though." Sure enough, though even their clothes lay untouched over the shafts of the wagon, the animals were gone. "They've got our guns, too. Now if you were a drunken peon, what would you go off looking for?"

"Women," Ellen replied without hesitation.

"You're right."

They put on their clothes, Tom substituting work clothes for his undertaker's costume. He began to search the ground. "Look, here are the hoofprints we want. Colorado's horse was unshod, so any shod prints will take us where we want to go, which seems to be off over there." He pointed to a track that led off into the palm grove.

"You stay here," he ordered. "Things may get wild where I'm going." He put the best of the pistols in his belt

and took up a rifle and cartridge belt.

"Are you crazy? One of these drunks is going to come to and I'll have a wild time on my hands, too. I don't know if I can shoot in cold blood. I'm coming with you." She picked up another rifle and a cartridge belt for herself.

They travelled fast up the track, Ellen almost having to run to keep up. She hoped it wasn't far. Around a turn in the track they came upon two more snoring on the ground, one of them covered with vomit. They drew the weapons of the sleeping men into the jungle, causing an unknown bird to squawk raucously and flap off through the trees. Tom began to trot as they heard distant singing that became louder and louder the nearer they approached. Soon it was easy to tell it was drunken singing. Abruptly Tom halted as they came to a clearing among the palms.

There were huts originally built for the coconut workers but now the scene of full scale revelry. There were only four or five women to the twenty-some men, but they also were drunk. They were all staggering through a dance that involved passing the women from man to man, but even as they watched, one of the men lay down with a woman right there in the open and, tearing his clothes open, mounted her. Quickly the others were grabbed as well, which involved several awkward tugs-of-war as two or three men would close in on one woman. One of the women began to scream.

Tom circled the clearing carefully and finally found the horses, still saddled, and the mules with improvised rope halters. Tom mounted *Adiós* and patted the scabbard that held his rifle. "They even got the right saddles on the right horses," he whispered, laughing. "The pigs didn't bother to loosen the cinches—they deserve to lose the horses."

They led the mules in a wide circle around the screaming cursing bacchanal that was now going on in the clear-

ing, and headed up the track toward the road. One of the two drunks they had seen on the way in was now leaning on a tree being sick, but he paid them no attention. Back at the wagon, Tom started to hitch the mules.

"Tom, you're mad! Let's take the horses and get out of here. Let them have the wagon."

"Not on your life," Tom said grimly, backing a mule into position. "They'll get nothing from me."

A man on the ground with a large stain of blood on his loose white shirt groaned and asked for water over and over. Ellen finally went into the wagon to get some. The inside of the wagon was chaos, but not much actually seemed to be missing. They had obviously intended to take the wagon with the contents intact to some other place to share out the loot. She lifted up the head of the wounded man and gave him water.

"It's not good for him with a stomach wound," she said, "but he'll die anyway and I can't stand to hear him begging."

They went as far as the first turn before Tom got out and handed her a palm frond, taking one himself. They returned a hundred yards where the wagon had been and backed up, sweeping all signs of the wagon track out back to the original site and past, until they came to the wagon once again. Tom tossed his branch up on the seat.

"Follow me." He walked carefully on the edge of the road where they would leave no tracks, took off his boots, and recreated his bare footsteps in the swept dirt. She saw what he had in mind and took off her own boots, wincing as her weight came down on a stone. By the time they reached the bend once more, she was all but lame. Behind her she could hear the wounded man start calling for water again, and she shivered.

"When they get around to figuring out who took what, they'll be working with terrible *crudos*, and with a hang-over you aren't so bright. They'll see our naked footprints

and no wagon tracks going in one direction, and they may figure when they see the wiped out tracks going in the other that someone else stole the outfit. They won't be fooled for long, but long enough if they don't notice the mules' shoes headed in the wrong direction right away."

Tom stayed on Adiós and hung back with his rifle out while she drove the wagon, keeping the mules at a trot. They left the palm plantation and came to rolling hills covered with dry scrub brush, here and there a small tree bare except for large white blossoms, flat as dinner plates. In the crotches of some of the trees were exotic blooms of a kind of wild orchid with spiky leaves. A flight of parrots flew raucously overhead. The sun went down and still they kept going. At last, by the light of an almost full moon, they came to a primitive sign saying Oro, with an arrow pointing off to the right. Tom rode up beside her and indicated she should turn off on the track. He snatched the palm frond, and wiped out their tracks well past the first turn.

"They may catch on before I think, and I don't want to take any chances. We'll follow this out to where it goes and try to get the wagon hidden before daylight."

They followed the winding track that serpentineed up over the hills between them and the ocean, and they came out finally on a flat beach that stretched as far as they could see in either direction, white in the moonlight against the black water. To their left was an outcropping of rock with a shadow that might have been a cleft in it, and beyond down the beach an enormous rock towering some fifty feet in the air on whose outer face the waves dashed themselves to pieces in great fountains of white spray that were blown by a stiff breeze into graceful long curtains of droplets. Tom rode Adiós over to the outcropping and gave a started exclamation of surprise.

"It's a cave!" he shouted. "Big enough for the wagon, I think."

They swung the wagon around and backed it with the mules until it disappeared into the cleft. The mules were unhitched, and Tom led them and the horses back to a damp place he'd seen glistening in the moonlight beside the road. He dug with his hands and saw that the cavity filled with water. Encouraged, he traced the damp until he found a wet rock face with a hollow at the bottom that would water the animals one at a time. He fastened their hobbles and tethered them loosely. They were out of sight of the track, and though a whinney from them would get them taken, it would also warn him of pursuers. He didn't think there would be any.

"What is that dreadful smell?" Ellen asked back at the cave where she had been putting the wagon back in order.

"Bat *guano*," Tom said cheerfully.

"Come daylight, we'll have lots of company in here. Do bats scare you?"

"Not really. I've never been with a lot of them before."

"No fire tonight. Have we anything we can eat cold?"

"There's a little cooked lobster that's still good and some cold beans."

"It'll have to do. I'm too tired to eat much anyway."

She remembered as they spooned down the beans hungrily despite their weariness that they hadn't eaten since morning, or rather yesterday morning, for it was well after midnight. They crept into the wagon thankfully, not even minding the strong smell of the bats. Though after that morning by the river they had neither intended nor wanted to sleep in the same bed again together, Ellen was unsurprised when he blew out the lamp they had allowed themselves inside the cave and crept into bed with her. He gathered her into his arms and buried his face in her throat, and she could feel him shiver under her hands. They lay like that for a long time without speaking or moving. At last they had warmed each other through, easing the tension that danger and fear had stretched

through them like a thin taut wire about to snap.

He drew a long breath. "I hope I'm never that close to dying soon again." She could feel his mouth move against her throat as he spoke.

"You didn't act frightened, except when you pretended to beg for mercy. You'd make a magnificent actor—even I believed you."

He laughed a little then. "That wasn't any pretense, love. All I had to do was relax and let my terror show. Negrito liked to kill, and Manco killed for profit and revenge, but this one killed for principle and punishment and was the most dangerous of all. Poor bastard, he was also the only true revolutionary of the lot. He knew we'd head for Manzanillo as being closer than Colima, and he also knew that those dry hills hadn't a drop of water in the dry season. By the time we'd decided to go back to where he knew there was water, it would have been too late even if our feet hadn't been bloody stumps by then. At least he didn't cut the soles of our feet off first."

"How did you know there was water here?"

"I didn't. But someone thought enough of the place to put up a sign, so I guessed there must be. There's sure not enough for any village, but it must have saved a lot of travellers."

Neither of them would speak of the tenuous truce that hazard of their lives had forced on them, nor did they speak any more of personal things. This night it was Ellen who cried out in her sleep though she couldn't afterward remember the dream that caused it. He stroked her hair and kissed her to comfort her, a kiss that unleashed a desire that was a celebration of life in the face of death. They took each other with a desperation made up of their feeling of vulnerability to circumstance and the foreknowledge of parting in the event they managed to stay alive. Again they slept, this time deep and long.

She woke to a marvellous familiar smell. "Hot coffee! I thought you—"

"—said we wouldn't have a fire?" he finished as he handed her a mug of steaming coffee. "We wouldn't have, only that wind out there is still blowing. I made a fire in the lee of some rocks out on the beach, and believe me, you can't see the smoke from five yards away because the wind has already blown it to Barra de Navidad. I thought you could maybe stand a little spoiling, and I even managed to shave." He sat on the side of the bed with his coffee.

"It seems such a long time since I had servants and beautiful clothes and nothing to do with my time but go riding on Luz and bedevil that poor school teacher who was trying to teach me proper Spanish. It's as if it was a different life in another age."

"It was, and we may never see its like again, the two of us anyway. Should the revolution finally succeed, and I think it will, the ones who then become rich will be a whole new breed."

"I thought the whole idea was that there were to be no very rich and no very poor."

He shook his head. "That isn't the way human nature works. You could give everybody in the world equal possessions and equal opportunity and within a few years we'd all be back where we started with some rich and some poor. Madero actually undertook a token division of lands: the government bought the land from the *hacendados* and gave it to the poor Indian peons. Those poor devils didn't know what to do with it, so they either left it unused or sold it, sometimes back to the same *hacendado* the government bought it from in the first place."

"Was there no one to tell them how to plant it?"

"How would you go about it? Those people are illiterate and suspicious of any strangers. Who would they listen to? Some day maybe there'll be enough education so something can be done, but it will take the better part of a century at least to shorten significantly the distance between the poor and the rich in this country."

"So all this killing is for nothing?"

"No, I wouldn't say that. The time of the great *haciendas* that don't produce is done. The absentee owners, the schooling in Europe, the sumptuous living in Mexico City, all that will be finished in a generation. The financial and actual slavery of *hacienda* workers will be finished as well, and men will no longer be beaten to death, or have their hands cut off, at the whim of the overseer. They'll still take advantage of the illiterate Indians, but at least there'll be no systematic murder and enslavement of them as Diaz did to the Yaquis. For these people, that's a lot, not to spend your life in debt so you can hand the burden on to your children. Our *hacienda* was better than most, and I figured that for some of those men, it would take around a hundred years to pay off what they were supposed to owe, even in the unlikely event they didn't have to borrow more just to die. Colorado was all too right about the vultures who batten on the dead."

When they finished their coffee, she asked, "What are we going to do now?"

"We're going to stay here all day, and tonight we're going to make a run for Manzanillo. I figure we have about twenty-five kilometers, fifteen miles, to go, and we should make that all right. The animals will be rested, it won't be hot at night, and we've got a big moon. Men like Colorado's don't like to be out and around at night when 'ghosties and ghoulies and long-legged beasties and things that go bump in the night' are about."

They walked down the flat beach that morning, past the great rock with its blowing spray and on up to a rocky headland. Tom carried his rifle. The ocean was rough, with large chopped up waves that broke in pieces, and the wind blew gauzy white banners of spray off the tops of the breaking surf. They saw only frigate birds and pelicans, the constant wind too uncomfortable for the smaller birds. There were a multitude of shells, but they were nearly all broken. It was a wild, bleak place with its

everlasting wind, the large broken combers that came pounding directly in from thousands of miles of open ocean, and the great black rock brooding over it all.

"I don't even feel like swimming," Ellen said, shivering a bit in just her shirt although it was now May. She felt dull and sad and wished they hadn't the rest of the day to get through before they could leave.

"Right now I don't want to fight anything, even the water," Tom agreed. She noticed that he was constantly looking around, often turning and walking backward a few steps to survey the beach behind them.

Inside the cave hundreds of bats hung upside down from the ceiling in the tents of their folded wings, like wizened, leathery little bags. In the wagon, Tom and Ellen got into bed to get warm, and made long slow love to each other, a final coming together before they parted for good. It was as if they were trying to memorize each other's bodies with their mouths and fingers, imprinting the shape of a breast, the rounding of a hip, the muscling of a back forever on the intricate convolutions of their brains. They fell asleep again in each other's arms and slept most of the afternoon.

"Listen!" He reared up suddenly on his elbows. "Did you hear a horse whinny?"

They listened, and the faint sound was repeated, almost lost in the crashing of the surf. Tom pulled on a pair of pants and his boots and took up his rifle as he rushed out and was gone. Ellen got dressed and went outside. She couldn't stand to wait blindly in the wagon in terror of who would open the door. The wind slanted down the empty beach, blowing thin drifts of loose sand before it. The whinney did not come again. Had they really heard it? Yet she knew that this late afternoon was right for Colorado's men to have walked off their hangovers following them and arrived on the winding track. There was no sign of Tom.

Standing in the keen edge of the wind on that bleak

strand with the serpentines of drifting sand blowing against her boots, Ellen took final leave of any foolish notions she might have been entertaining about the future. Now, when she didn't know if Tom would return or not, or if there would come instead some others who would cause her death, now she would take her real farewell of him. He and she had used each other, that was all, and for her the use hadn't been enough; she had had to begin making up dreams as well. No more. Her hair snapped free from its pins in the wind and her eyes teared. She felt the old familiar hurting weight inside that she had carried with her ever since that other cave when she had lost the child, the weight that had begun to lift at Manco's camp and been forgotten at La Trinidad.

She was still standing there looking out at the rough, flecked green waves without seeing them when she felt a hand on her shoulder. She knew whose hand it was without looking, and she didn't even turn around.

"You shouldn't be out here, love. What if it had been Colorado's people?"

"You'd better stop calling me 'love' now, Tom, or you'll slip up and do it in Manzanillo," she said calmly. "It was always a misnomer anyway."

His hand dropped from her shoulder. "There's a man here badly hurt. It was his horse that made our horses neigh."

She did turn then, and saw a form lying at the entrance to the cave, his buckskin mare standing hipshot beside him, her head drooping. They went back walking apart, and she knelt and gently unfastened the wounded man's shirt. He was young, hardly more than a boy, clean-shaven. He was dressed as a *vaquero*, though they had seen no cattle in these dry hills. The shirt stuck to the wound, an ugly hole just below his navel. When she felt behind him, she found a smaller hole in his back. His eyes were closed.

She looked up at Tom and shook her head. "Those homemade muskets make an awful tearing wound you could drive a cart through. There's nothing we can do for him except hope he dies before he's conscious again. How far do you suppose he's ridden like that? Not far, I think."

"That means our friends are not far from here."

The young man groaned and clutched his belly.

"I'll get the laudanum from my bag," she said. "At least I can keep him from suffering."

When she returned, Tom had the boy's head in his lap. "I was sent by my *patrón*," the boy was saying, the sweat standing out in beads on his face, "to take a message to his sister in Manzanillo. Our ranch is inland from Barra de Navidad, almost to Autlán, and we knew of no outlaws here. When I first saw them, I came on them walking toward me around a bend in the road, and it was too late to go back. They were all on foot except for a rickety old bay or I'd never have tried it. I rode straight through them at a full run, firing in the air as I came. They all dived for the ditch at the side of the road, and I passed them. I was sure I'd gotten by them safely, but then I felt a blow on my back that nearly knocked me off the horse." He looked up at Tom with frightened eyes. "I had to hold my guts in, but a loop kept falling out." He began to cry silently.

"Do you know how long it was until you came here?"

The boy shook his head. "A long time, I think. I couldn't keep the thing in with the horse running, so I had to pull her to a walk. Oh God, it hurts so!"

"Here," Ellen said, "drink this." She lifted his head and helped him swallow down the bitter draught.

After a while he stopped crying and they realized he was dead. When they searched him, they found the message and a little money, which Tom put to one side. They buried him up on one of the dunes with its sparse thorny vegetation where the water wouldn't uncover him in the summer storms. They brought the animals down, hitched

up the wagon, and set off up the track, Tom on Adios and the two mares hitched behind. They waited only to water the buckskin, who was thirsty.

"They were going back when he met them, so they'd given us up," Tom said.

"If they knew he was badly wounded, they would follow him, wouldn't they? They were horse-hungry, surely they wouldn't let the chance of a horse go by like that?"

"He said he thought he was clear. Either way, we'd better make whatever time we can and hope they'll stop at dark, which won't be long now."

There was no sign on the main road of any tracks except the buckskin's. They put the mules at a trot while there was still good light and went by a seemingly endless stretch of the low dry brushy hills. In an open field as the light was fading they saw a strange vision, a tree loaded with pink blossoms standing all by itself. In the dying light the pink glowed against the dull brown background, looking as if each blossom was lighted somehow from within.

"I've never seen anything like it," Tom said, awed. "It's like a rose-colored flame burning all by itself out in that barren field."

They alternately walked and trotted the mules, Tom riding far behind with the rifle across his saddle bow. After three or four hours, Ellen saw something glittering ahead, and then they were coming down a hill overlooking a bay almost as large as La Trinidad, only this one had an arm of water that swept by below and behind them, fronted by a headland covered with dense growth. The moonlight glowed on the bay, and as the road came down and paralleled the beach, she could see enormous waves shining in the moonlight as they rose up dark out of the bright water. When they toppled over, their crests white with foam, they hit with a great thumping noise as if they

were trying to shake the very earth.

"Care for a swim?" Tom had come up beside the wagon.

"They'd be something to dive through at that, wouldn't they? Imagine all that water towering over you. However, I think I'll forego the pleasure tonight."

At the southern end of the long white beach, they passed lagoons, followed by coconut palm and banana plantations on either side. There were no lights, and not a dog barked. After a few miles they came out again upon another beach, having evidently crossed the neck of another peninsula. Ahead of them now they could see a distant glitter of lights. Ellen's hands tightened on the reins nervously. Those lights shining so innocently marked the ending of a piece of her life. From there she would return full circle to where she had come from in the beginning, and all of this that was Mexico would seem as unreal as California did to her now. Gone would be the killing and the violence, but gone too the passion and the living of every moment as if it might be the last.

Her inward eye roamed over the rock-slabbed mountains shouldering their way up into a thunder-headed sky across a fertile valley, the deep mysterious green *barrancas* with their spectacular waterfalls, the long stretch of red dry lake with the dust devils spinning across the powdery surface, the coolness of the pines with their sunny, flower-covered clearings, the long deadly slope brooded over by El Fuego, the river bordered by papaya and banana plantations, the breathtaking rock-studded bay at La Trinidad with its long curving white beach and river channel littered with delicate shells, the road south shadowed by the palm trees on either side that in places actually met overhead, the bleak windswept Oro with its towering rock formation and cave of bats; all these marched across her memory on the way to a slow oblivion.

The lights came nearer, and they began to see an occasional bit of candlelight in the darkness to their left, while a row of high dunes cut off their view of the sea on their right. They could hear the waves, however, far gentler ones than the towering walls of water that crashed on the last beach. Over the mountains ahead came the first false light before the true dawn, and she saw it as an omen.

Tom came up beside the mules and stopped them. "We're almost there, Ellen." In the growing light she could see the smudge of beard on his face; he looked desperately tired. "I haven't seemed to treat you very well, have I? Certainly not as a gentleman. If it's any comfort to you, I'm sorry for it. You wouldn't ever belong with a renegade like me—you should have a nice young man and a houseful of kids, and one day you will in spite of all that's happened."

"Is that what you've been stewing over all this way? You are bound and determined, aren't you, to say exactly the wrong thing. I thought of you as a number of things, Tom, but never stuffy, and you're being very stuffy now. In fact, you're sounding like Carlos at his worst. Do you know he wanted both of us to forget the first time he made love to me because gentlemen married only virgins? If I hadn't seduced him again, he'd probably have sprinkled blood on the bed on our wedding night to keep up pretenses!"

Tom began to protest, but she went on determinedly. "You're doing the same. *Gentleman!* Sorry! I sometimes wonder if you were swept away by me or by Carlos's wife. Were you thinking of Carlos at Trinidad, I wonder?"

"You know I wasn't—and I should have."

"I've heard it all now. I suppose like those poor women in India who are burned alive along with their dead husbands, I should perform *suttee* on myself because Carlos is dead. Don't worry, you needn't use him as an excuse to cut off a love affair that's no longer convenient. I was

through with it back at Oro. Apparently unlike you, I revelled in every minute of it, and I have no intention of feeling either guilty or ashamed over it. When you're this tired, Tom, you really should keep your speeches to yourself."

"I didn't do that very well, did I?" he said with a ghost of a smile, dropping the mule's rein and riding back along the wagon. He took one of her hands in his and kissed it and let her go.

He turned Adiós then and galloped back to his trailing position, his rifle still out. They crossed a long causeway that led to the port proper, the lanterns along the docks reflecting themselves in the still dark water. As they entered the city, they could see it was clustered around and sprawled up the sides of a steep hill, the multicolored houses high up perched hazardously on the steep slopes and no streets, only walks between the houses. Below, the streets were narrow and already crowded with freight wagons both loaded and empty. Several ships and some fishing boats were tied up to a dock where men with pushcarts hauled what looked like green bananas over to one of the ships. The pier pilings were draped with fishing nets. Tom came up beside her again.

"Turn left here, and we'll try to find a place on the outskirts of town to get some sleep until I can turn you over to the proper authorities."

"Heavens, Tom, you make it sound as if you were giving me to an orphanage—or the police."

He had enough left to grin suddenly, and she felt a wrench inside that she ignored. He was after all, as an aunt of hers in Santa Barbara used to say, eminently unsuitable.

They threaded their way through the streets past the crowded market where hawkers shouted their wares, and men stood by pushcarts piled high with papayas, bananas, tomatoes, onions, dried peppers, oranges, pineap-

ples, and early mangos. A cascade of large silver fish spilled from a broken sack onto the walkway around the market, and a gust of enticing smells of cooking food nearly drowned them, hungry as they were. By tacit consent they decided not to stop, however. They both knew that if they stopped they would never start again, and a bed and sleep came even above food.

They clopped through a section of closed shops and sleeping houses, all jammed side by side. It was as if the town had been poured into the too-narrow rocky peninsula, the overflow piling up a pinnacle in the middle. The clutter thinned and they were headed out of town once more, passing wooden shacks on pilings looking out over a lagoon redolent with dead fish with a marsh on one side and a chopped-off hillside that eventually gave way to coconut palms on the other. They rounded a bend to find the palms had stopped and in the clearing a familiar scene.

"Oh Tom!" Ellen cried, feeling like weeping but pushing the tired mules to a trot. "Can it be the same one?"

One of the men sitting around a fire looked up at them as they approached. "Well, well, look who's here," Alonzo said grinning. "You're just in time for breakfast."

Raúl gave them one of his rare smiles, and Ellen burst into tears.

CHAPTER XX

Raúl and Gregorio unhitched the mules, Tom had led the unsaddled stallion and the mares off to where the other circus animals were kept. Alonzo handed Ellen a plateful of meat and beans.

"You've changed around a bit in the horse department. Where did the stud and the buckskin mare come from? He's a beauty. What happened to the black?" He was making conversation to give her time to recover. She had been so glad to see them she had hugged Raúl, who looked disconcerted but surprisingly stood still for it.

"Let's see, the last time we saw the black, he was staggering off with one of the survivors of Manco's band, but before that Tom won the stallion gambling when they hanged Négrito, that was before he gambled for me..." She trailed off at the expression on Alonzo's face and then began to laugh. "Alonzo, I don't know if you'd believe it if we told you all of it, but when Tom gets back, we'll try. How's Demetrio? He must have taken poor César's death hard."

"He did," Alonzo said, "but life goes on. We now have another star performer, two of them in fact. We all miss old César, though."

"Who are the replacements?"

"Wait and see. You'll see one of the performances tonight, won't you?"

"I wouldn't miss it for anything. Please, Alonzo, could I have another plate of beans?"

Tom came back then, and Alonzo gave a piercing whistle, bringing all of the circus people running. There were excited greetings, and Ellen kissed Demetrio, who blushed. "Now tell us what happened all at once," Alonzo said. "It'll save you doing it fifty times over."

For over an hour they told the story of where they had gone and what they had done, a saga that seemed improbable even to them. They left out the attempted rape and the murder of Chirlo, and everything that had happened between her and Tom. Their audience murmured sympathetically over the death of Carlos, laughed at Tom's gambling for her and trapping Colorado's men with the cane alcohol, sighed over the death of the young cowboy carrying the message to Manzanillo. "The hell of it is," Tom said, "the message was nothing more than an answer to an invitation to some grand ball here in the next few days."

Ellen realized that she was now running on nerve alone, and when Alonzo broke out a bottle of mescal to celebrate, she excused herself and went to bed. Tired as she was, however, she lay awake for a while staring up at the familiar wagon roof that she would probably never see again after today. She came up out of a deep sleep when the wagon door was flung open with a bang. Tom stumbled in, drunkenly singing:

"Green grow the rushes, O;
Green grow the rushes, O;
The sweetest hours that e'er I spend,

"Green grow—"

"There's naught but care on every hand,
In every hour that passes, O;
What signifies the life of man,
And 'twere not for the lasses, O.

Are spent among the lasses, O.

He broke off suddenly, swearing, and she saw he was having trouble getting into the top bunk. "Oh hell," he muttered finally and stumbled fully clothed into the lower bunk, where he fell sound asleep.

When she woke again hours later, he was still in the same position, the smudge of beard on his face now a stubble and deep lines around his mouth and between his eyebrows. She pulled off his boots and then his pants, covering him lightly with the sheet over his shirt and underwear. He stirred and muttered, "Don't go, don't go." She guessed he was reliving the day when it began, when he was telling Carlos not to go to Guadalajara. She leaned over and gently kissed him on the cheek. "Good-bye, love," she whispered, and slipped quietly out of the wagon.

Outside, she blinked in the late afternoon light, then heard another familiar voice say, "It's about time, my dear. I was about to go in and get you."

"Fausto! Oh Fausto, it's so good to see you!" She was half laughing and half crying, hugging him. "You look so splendid in your new uniform." She backed off a little and laughed. "You're looking absolutely irresistible. Where's Juanita? I thought you'd have sailed for California long since."

"Juanita? Shopping, where else? I decided that if I minded so much about that bastard Huerta, I should stay and do something about him. The garrison here happily doesn't like him any better than I do, though I don't know

if I can actually get them to do anything rash." He looked her over and frowned.

"You look like a boy except for your hair," he said disapprovingly, then grinned. "We'll soon fix that. Come along, the *comandante* has had to spend a lot of time on you, and I'm to take you immediately to his house on Playa Azul."

"How far is that?" she asked, alarmed at the idea of another journey anywhere.

"Not far," he soothed, "only over the causeway. We'll take my carriage."

"I'd better change my clothes. I do have a skirt and blouse, I think, if Colorado's men didn't take them."

"Never mind," he said grandly. "Juanita has been shopping for you. You can send for anything you left behind in the wagon later."

"That's very generous of you, Fausto, but Tom has some of the Santa Cruz money he's keeping for me. I'm not destitute, you know."

The general tucked her hand through his arm and patted it. "Not to worry. I'm sorry about Carlos, *chiquita*, but he would prefer it so, I know."

She was grateful to him for not saying that it was all for the best, and she squeezed his arm. "If Juanita didn't already have you, I'd snatch you in a minute, she laughed, echoing what she'd told him many times before.

They came to a carriage drawn by two beautiful matched bays, and set off through the city once more. What a difference the soft cushions and gentle springing of the carriage made after the jolting wagon. Fausto stopped in the middle of a block to the rage of the carts and freight wagons behind, and let out a shrill whistle not unlike Alonzo's. Juanita popped out of a doorway followed by a boy loaded down with boxes and parcels.

Juanita laughed up at her with sparkling eyes. "Elena, you look terrible! Trust an idiot man to bring you back

like this. You may have made off with the best looking one of the lot, but obviously not the brightest. Even Fausto would have done better."

Once in the carriage, she went on breathlessly, "Your hands, Elena, what have you done to your poor hands? Did the brute make you scrub floors?"

Ellen laughed helplessly. "No, only drive mules and cook and wash up."

"*Qué caray*, Elena! The man's a monster."

"Juanita," Ellen said firmly then, "I seem to remember you cooking and washing clothes when we were all with the circus. Have you forgotten so soon?"

"I forgot just as soon as ever I could," Juanita said irrepressibly, and they all laughed.

They trotted across the causeway back the way she and Tom had come in the early morning that seemed so distant now. They came to a neck of land covered with palm trees and large houses on both sides of the road, then turned through an open gateway and down a palm-shaded drive to a large, tile-roofed house facing out to sea. A boy ran out to take the horses, and the door was opened by the *comandante's* wife herself, a birdlike little woman who welcomed her with open arms.

"Honorio will be so relieved you've come!" she exclaimed. "You can't imagine what trouble there's been over you. He was beside himself when he found out by chance that his own soldiers had turned you back north of here, and when you didn't come in, he sent troops after you. They went clear to Colima by the back road but didn't find you. They're looking up around Barra de Navidad right now."

"We went down to the ocean and waited until we thought Colorado was elsewhere. He's dead, by the way."

"Is he?" she said brightly. "Well, Honorio will certainly be glad to hear that. Nothing but a troublemaker, that one. Would you believe that two of our *mozos* ran off to

join him?" Still chattering, she led Ellen to the room she would occupy, all white ruffled chiffon. Ellen had forgotten that such rooms existed. Juanita and several *mozos* followed, carrying all of the parcels, and two maids appeared to unpack the clothes and press them, and to draw a bath.

"I'll leave you now, Elena. You're in good hands," Juanita said.

"Wait!" Ellen called. "Juanita, I want to go to the circus tonight. Do you suppose you and the general could help me?"

"But of course. I want to see it again myself when I'm nothing more than part of the audience. Fausto will talk to the *comandante*."

Nothing had ever felt so good as that first hot bath. She sank into it with a groan and lay there for a while before lathering herself from head to foot with the perfumed soap put out for her. At last when the water had gone cool, she reluctantly got out and dried with an enormous soft fluffy bath towel. What a sinful luxury! She put on the rose-colored negligée and returned to her room, where she saw that all of the wrappings had disappeared and the dresses now hung in the closet. She couldn't even remember the last time she'd had on a dress.

Soon after she had dressed, the *comandante* himself appeared, which surprised her. The running of a major port when the country was in what could only be described as a state of war was a large job, and surely he didn't make a practice of returning home so soon after he had already taken time out for the large two o'clock meal, the *comida* around which ever Mexican household revolved.

A dapper little colonel who looked much like his wife as many long-married couples seem to, he bowed and kissed her hand. "You have no idea how glad I am to see you." His greeting was indeed heartfelt.

"You and your wife are most kind for taking me in like this," she replied. "I hope I won't be too much trouble."

"I wouldn't let you stay anywhere else, I don't want you disappearing again."

"Colonel, what's this all about?"

"Come on into the library. There is much you don't know and even more I don't know."

When they were seated, he went on, "I first heard of you in a countrywide inquiry soon after Madero's death. Your husband's brother instigated it when he found bandits had taken over the *hacienda*, but you and your husband were nowhere to be found. I have been informed that your husband passed on. You have my sympathy, madame."

Ellen bowed her head and thought to herself that she was glad Juanita hadn't known about Carlos when she was shopping or she'd probably have bought her everything in black. As it was, she could always plead circumstance in wearing colors. Yet of course Juanita knew. Wasn't she the sly one though? Ellen hated the cult they made in Mexico of mourning, especially on the part of the women. Sometimes for years after the death of a husband or son a woman would go about dressed entirely in black, up to and including a black veil.

"I thought you were probably holed up in Guadalajara somewhere," the colonel went on, "and paid very little attention. The next thing I knew was that only two weeks ago the commanding general of the State of Colima received urgent appeals from," and he ticked them off on his fingers, "the Mexican ambassador in Washington, your American ambassador Wilson in Mexico City, Foreign Minister Francisco de la Barra, your father in California, and your husband's brother Don Salvador Alvarez. It seemed you had sent telegrams from Colima both to your father and to Don Salvador."

"Colonel Lopez in Colima—and I sympathize with

him entirely, I might say—said that he had refused you passage with the supply train to Manzanillo, something he will probably regret for a long time. Our commanding general is not a very understanding man. Lopez also said, however, that he had advised you to stay in the city. When you were obviously not there, he discovered you had left on a secondary road in a vehicle disguised as a hearse—complete with corpse, I understand.” There was an unmistakable twinkle in his eyes, and Ellen decided that she liked him.

“Then my own men turned you back, and we’ve been scouring the countryside for you ever since. Where in the hell *were* you?” The twinkle was gone, and Ellen decided that the commanding general must indeed have been lacking in understanding.

“We went to a beach called La Trinidad and waited until we thought Colorado might have left the area. As it happened, we were captured by him anyway.”

“Were you now?” The colonel leaned forward intently. “Not many escape him.”

“Tom—Mr. Kilpatrick, that is—had foreseen that fifty liters of cane alcohol might come in handy, as they certainly did. They had no sooner turned us loose without shoes to make our way on foot to Manzanillo than they all got roaring drunk, except Colorado. In the ensuing argument, he was shot dead.”

“How splendid!” the colonel gloated openly. “Are you sure? It couldn’t have been one of his men?”

Ellen shook her head. “It was Colorado, all right. There were others dead as well, and the next day at Oro a cowboy from an inland *hacienda* carrying a message got to us just before he died after being shot by the survivors of the band. We have his horse and message; or rather, Mr. Kilpatrick does.”

The colonel rubbed his hands. “General Ruíz will be delighted to hear it.” He stood up. “We’ll have another

talk soon and have the rest of your adventures, my dear. Meanwhile, I'll go have a talk with your Mr. Kilpatrick. He's staying at the circus, is he not?"

"As far as I know. I doubt he's gone very far because he'll have had a terrible *crudo* when he woke up." This time the twinkle was in her eye.

He looked taken aback for a moment, then burst into laughter. "I must say, you're the most outspoken young lady I've met in a long time." He put on his hat and picked up his gloves and swagger stick.

"Colonel, I just remembered, you haven't heard anything about the arrival of a Dr. Antonio García, have you? He had been practicing in Tocoalco, in Jalisco."

"No, my dear, I haven't. If you've turned up, however, I'd venture to say he will. I'll ask my adjutant."

That night they all went to the circus: the colonel and his wife, Fausto and Juanita, and Ellen. Ellen wondered a bit at the colonel's wife being so friendly with someone like Juanita, but it was explained when she was told that Juanita and the general had gotten married, crossed swords, rifle salutes, and all.

"I must say," the colonel remarked at dinner that night before they left for the circus, "your fellow traveller is a surly lot, isn't he? He couldn't have been much fun to travel with."

"I don't think he felt very well, colonel," she replied demurely. "If it hadn't been for him, I'd never have gotten here. Perhaps you knew that even before he died, my husband was not himself."

The colonel nodded. "I took a stenographer with me and made him tell me the whole story right from the beginning."

Ellen almost burst out laughing, thinking of Tom, suffering a colossal hangover, having to spend at least an hour going over the same story he'd told that morning.

"You certainly did have an adventure, didn't you?" the colonel continued. "I'm sure his account will suffice for the report I intend sending the interested parties. I won't need to stir up unfortunate memories of atrocities I'm sure you'd rather forget." He patted her hand comfortingly, and Ellen wondered if Tom had included the fact that when Colorado sent them away, they were mother naked, the both of them.

They all sat in box seats right down in front for the performance. The box consisted of four two-by-fours with supporting pieces knocked together in a square in which wooden chairs were placed. She was curious about César's successors, but could see no new animals in the opening procession unless you counted the bear Raúl had rescued in Tocoalco, looking a good deal better than he had when she had last seen him. There were several new human performers, however, including a hard-looking woman in a top hat and formal riding costume on a horse that danced to the music. Little Doroteo slid out of the procession and handed Ellen a balloon with a conspiratorial wink. She grinned at him and blew him a kiss, which brought a laugh.

Early on Demetrio announced, "The one and only Madame Sevigny, Polish noblewoman who was trained in dressage in the world famous riding school in Vienna, and her renowned stallion, Count Brizeé."

The woman really put on a remarkable performance, Ellen had to admit, though she rather thought the horse had never seen the outside of Mexico. The applause was thunderous for a Mexican audience, who tended to enjoy their spectacles, except for the bull fight, almost in silence. However, they all knew horses, and they knew what they were looking at here and how difficult it must have been to train the white horse to do it.

During the half intermission, the lion taming cage was erected, just as in the past. Did they have a new lion?

Demetrio announced that the battle of the century was about to take place, between a ferocious bear and a wild bull. A rather phlegmatic looking longhorn bull trotted into the cage, absentmindedly hooking his horns this way and that. Then César's old cage, was wheeled in and Raúl's bear made an appearance. The bull perked up, and began to paw the ground and hook in earnest. The bear raised to his full height standing on his hind legs, growling and snarling. Ellen felt sad that gentle Demetrio was so desperate as to put on one of those cruel shows pitting animal against animal until one really hurt the other. She had to assume that the bear usually got the better of it or he wouldn't still be there.

They pawed and snorted, snarled and growled, until the audience began to be restive. "They made a mistake this time," Señora Guevarra remarked in a low voice. Suddenly the bear assumed a boxing stance and closed with the bull, jabbing at him repeatedly and clumsily dancing away. The bull finally gave him a comically reproachful look and sat down. The bear came over and patted him on the shoulder, then rested his arm across the bull's neck and crossed his legs. Demetrio came in and pronounced, "The winnah, and still world champion, 'Pulgito' Ramos, Little Flea Ramos," and raised the bear's paw in victory.

It wasn't the same at all, Ellen thought, feeling sad and let down. Nothing stayed the same, everything changed, and most of it for the worst. The audience clapped good-naturedly. Later came the clowns, and after the usual slapstick, all but one of them left. Was it Gregorio? The clown was suddenly a drunk on his last legs. Oh no, Ellen said to herself, "not that old saw again. Then the bear ambled in all by himself, walked up behind the clown, and put his paws over the clown's eyes, cocking his head as if to say, "Guess who?" There then transpired a very funny bawdy monologue in which the clown tried to guess which

of his friends this was, each of them having something in common with the bear's anatomy. The clown was Demetrio, of course. In the end, the drunk turned around and, instead of being horrified as the crowd expected, he exclaimed, "Josefina darling, it is you!" They embraced and went off arm in arm.

In the final procession, there appeared the familiar family group, but instead of César, it was the bear dressed in a polka-dot dress holding the same flower. Ellen's eyes dimmed with tears as she thought of that other polka-dot dress with the spreading stain. She hoped that César was in whatever heaven he chose, perhaps performing right now in front of celestial audiences. Fausto's hand pressed her arm comfortingly, and she knew he was aware of what she was thinking. Though she looked for him all during the performance, she saw nothing of Tom.

Ellen woke once toward morning, wondering why she wasn't in the wagon. It took her a desperate few seconds to remember why she was among all these alien white ruffles. When she went to sleep again, she dreamed that she and Tom were riding in the mountains hunting deer. He shot a pretty doe, who turned stricken eyes on Ellen as the blood gushed from her mouth. She woke horrified. Strange, she thought, she had never dreamed of Tom when they were travelling together. The last time she remembered dreaming of him was when he had gone off and left Antonio and her with Carlos. Where was Antonio now?

When Fausto had asked her what she wanted from the wagon, she said her saddle, saddle blanket, bridle, and torn riding skirt that she had replaced with Carlos's pants. She also wanted the sorrel mare. That morning he appeared in his carriage with the matched bays again, the mare tied behind.

"What did Tom say?" she asked casually.

"Nothing. He wasn't there. They said if I wanted to talk

to him to knock on Madame Sevigny's wagon." He watched her closely.

"He didn't waste any time, did he?"

Fausto put his hand on hers. "I wouldn't have told you, Elena, only I didn't want you to trip over it if you rode out there to see Alonzo and the others."

"I have no claim on him, we're just friends," Ellen answered defiantly.

He gave a sad little smile and patted her hand again. "I know, *chiquita*," he said gently.

That evening the colonel told her there was a place for her on a ship leaving a week later. "Actually, she doesn't dock until tomorrow. Your father has wired that he is having funds transferred to your account in the bank here and that he is sending someone to escort you home. The chaperone will arrive on the same ship you will be taking, the *North Star*, and two passages have been booked for the return voyage."

Let it be Rosa, she thought desperately. Rosa, who had always bathed her scrapes and wiped her nose. She needed Rosa's common sense and humor. What she really wanted was to put her head on Rosa's breast and cry her eyes out. She shouldn't be all that unhappy. Against all odds she had come through alive when at times it didn't seem possible she could escape. Anticlimax, that's what she was suffering from most. She was very tired and let down, that was what was causing the aching sense of loss that would not let her be. These last few months had made her realistic if nothing else, and if this sense of loss was for Carlos, it was for a life with him that she had never had. She lowered her eyes to her all but untouched plate of roast quail stuffed with spiced orange slices, she who had so recently wolfed down beans and tortillas. She sipped at the French wine, remembering a tin cup of mescal and water. It was only later that she thought to wonder at her father's change of heart.

The *North Star* was half a day late, but Ellen wouldn't

leave the dock despite Fausto's grumbling. "Go get yourself a drink or something," she said finally. "You don't have to stay with me."

He looked shocked. "You're not a circus woman anymore, Elena. Of course I can't leave you alone on the dock."

In the end they went to a nearby restaurant for shrimp sautéed in garlic butter. They weren't even through the main course when they heard the bronze bell high up on the point ringing to announce a ship. Ellen started to get up. Fausto put a restraining hand on her arm.

"It will be the better part of an hour before the passengers get off that ship. Finish your shrimp, and we'll have a flan and coffee before we go."

She made herself sit and choke down the dessert and coffee, smile and answer cheerfully, when all the time she wanted desperately to be out on the dock waiting. Home suddenly had a significance for her that was new. It wasn't just a familiar place where you grew up, it represented safety from harm and hurt of whatever kind. Ellen realized that she had never been completely happy and at ease with herself since she had left. The high points since had been higher than anything before, but all those highs had been paid for dearly. All she really wanted now was calm and peace. She had had enough emotional storms to last a lifetime.

Though she was craning her neck to see each passenger as they came pouring down the gangplank, she missed seeing him entirely. Of course, she had been looking for Rosa, and also she had never seen him dressed in a suit complete with vest and high collar and soft grey hat.

"Hello, Ellie," the strange young man said, taking both her hands in his and smiling at her.

"Billy! Billy Morton, I didn't even recognize you!" She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on the mouth. "Billy, Billy, you've grown up!"

He grinned, seeming more like the old Billy. "I'd like to remind you, I'm older than you are. You smell of garlic, but I can't fault a welcome like that." He drew her to him then and gave her a very unbrotherly kiss in return.

"As your chaperone, Elena, I really must advise you to indulge in such behavior in private," Fausto said, but he was smiling broadly.

Billy swung around. "Who's that? What's he saying?"

Ellen laughed. "I forgot, they don't speak Spanish quite like that where you come from." She said in French out of the corner of her mouth to Fausto, "Be quiet, you shameless old pander, or I'll tell Juanita you tried to attack me."

Fausto guffawed and replied in Spanish, "That's the first real spirit you've shown since you arrived. Tell me, young man, do you speak Spanish?"

"Of a sort," Bill answered a little grumpily. "That was how I persuaded her father to let me come instead of him."

"How is he?" she asked.

He grinned again. "Fine. He's married."

"Married? You're joking!" She fell into English in her astonishment.

"Nope. That's another reason he didn't come."

"Who did he marry?"

"Oh, a nice widow in her thirties you probably don't even know. Her husband was a banker in Santa Barbara. Her name is Mary, and I must say, she's a smasher all right. He did right well by himself."

Ellen felt confused. All of the nice pictures she had built up of how it would be when she got home had shattered. She remembered Rosa predicting just such an event. So she would now be an outsider in someone else's family, she thought rebelliously. Well, she herself could always look around for someone to marry. Two could play at that game.

"I'm sorry, Fausto, it was rude to speak in English."

"I have a little English myself," he said, still smiling. "I can't speak much, but I can understand quite a bit. This has been a shock, your father marrying again?"

"It certainly has. I hope she likes me," she said ruefully, "or I'll be out on my own after all."

He squeezed her shoulder reassuringly. "She will, you'll see. And now don't you think you might present me to your young man?"

After clearing a very indifferent customs man, they had collected Billy's suitcases, which were now being carried by two grinning porters who had materialized from nowhere. They approached Fausto's carriage, and Billy whistled when he saw the matched bays. "I thought all you had down here were burros and mustangs," he said tactlessly.

"The United States is not the only country that raises good horseflesh," Fausto said a little stiffly, his broad smile disappearing.

"Billy, how could you?" Ellen demanded. "Fausto, you'll just have to get used to the idea that Americans are forthright to the point of rudeness sometimes. You've seen enough of me not to be surprised."

Mollified, Fausto handed her into the carriage, saw to the loading of the luggage, and they set off for the causeway. "Manzanillo is the oldest port in Mexico," he explained politely to Billy. "Long before the Spaniards came, the Indians had a trade going with China, perhaps even before the twelfth century. It seems Columbus didn't discover the New World after all."

Billy had taken off his hat, and his familiar yellow shock of hair made Ellen smile. He was listening politely to Fausto while turning his head from side to side drinking in all of the strange sights and sounds and smells of a busy tropical port town. Ellen suddenly realized how much she had come to take for granted that to Billy came

under the heading of extraordinary.

When they returned to the Playa Azul house, they found that the colonel and his wife had accepted an invitation for *comida* elsewhere. Billy had dined on the ship, and Fausto took his leave to collect Juanita, who had been playing cards with some of her new women friends. "She cheats," Fausto laughed. "She says it's too tame a pastime otherwise."

"Well?" Billy asked when they were seated out on the terrace overlooking the ocean.

"Well what?"

"Aren't you going to tell me what happened? I'm sorry about your husband, Ellie. We only heard about him just before I got on the boat."

"How could you have? Fausto and the circus people didn't know he was dead, and Dr. García never got through."

Billy shrugged. "All I know is that your father got a telegram saying he was dead and that you would be getting in touch with him."

"How strange," she murmured. They had told Lopez in Colima, but he had no reason to wire. Salvador! Of course, she had told him. "Was the telegram from Zacatecas?"

"No. Manzanillo."

Well, perhaps Salvador had wired Manzanillo then. It really didn't matter. "Where should I start?" Ellen asked.

"I don't want you to relive anything painful. I don't even want to hear it myself. Start with the beach picnic, I never saw you after that, you know. Your father was beside himself when you eloped. I was pretty angry, too."

"You? You were in love with Rosemary Wightman, remember?"

"That was only a crush. I was always going to marry you."

"Billy Morton, you never said a word about it. I—I

don't know what to say." He looked so young and innocent and untouched, he made her want to cry. She felt like his grandmother.

"I wasn't going to say anything right away, I was going to wait. Don't say anything now," he pleaded, his face open and so very vulnerable.

"That's best," she said gently. "Everything has happened so fast I don't know how I feel about anything. Give me time, Billy—please."

The worst thing you could do to the people you really cared for, she thought, was to make them over in your mind to be somebody else they could never be. She knew who Billy was. His father and mother had always shown an easy affection that gave him the sweetness of nature that had always made her enjoy being with him. He had no Nacozaris of the spirit. They could have that house above Coxo after all, and it would be easy to forget that her imagination had once put someone else in it.

CHAPTER XXI

"I suppose you'll be going to the grand ball tomorrow night?" Lorenzo's wife Anita asked a little wistfully. "Now that you're going about with the quality, you're sure to have been included."

"Yes, I'm going," Ellen said, "but to tell you the truth I wish we were all back in Zacatlán instead. I loved it with the circus."

She had brought Billy out to meet her circus friends, knowing he would be interested in seeing a circus from the inside for once. She went over to where he was talking to Doroteo and put her arm through his. He had become her anchor in a running sea of bewilderment, and she clung to him desperately as the only hope of an uncertain future. That was all she had done with Tom, she thought, clung to him because he was the only one around.

As she stood there arm in arm with Billy, she saw Tom picking his way toward them among the wagons and equipment. Despite herself her heart lurched, and she took a deep breath.

"This is Billy Morton, Tom." She smiled brightly as he came up to them.

Billy put out his hand, smiling openly. "I'm glad to meet you, sir. I understand I have you to thank for bringing Ellie back to me."

Tom's face went still, and he hesitated for a moment before taking Billy's hand. "She talked about you a lot," he finally ventured, and Ellen knew he was thinking of the first time they had gone swimming naked at La Trinidad. She blushed.

"Are you going to continue with the circus?" Billy asked, interested.

"No, I imagine I'll ride back to Santa Cruz one of these days soon and start picking up the pieces."

"Right now he's learning dressage from an expert," she said, smiling sweetly, "an expert who was trained in the high *école* in Vienna. Don't you think that's exciting?" She was viciously delighted to see a look of startled alarm cross Tom's face before it closed up again.

"Dressage, eh? That *is* interesting." Poor well-meaning Billy was playing right into her hands. "Tell me, how do they train the horses to do those caracoles? It's downright against a horse's nature."

But Tom had recovered himself. "It's difficult, all right," he admitted easily, "but if you have lots of patience and gentle them enough, you'll find they'll do most anything." He was looking at Ellen all the time he was saying this, and she finally dropped her eyes. She knew what he was really saying, and as usual he'd had the last word.

"I'm glad you find your lessons so fascinating," she replied in a weak parting shot. "Come on, Billy, we've got to get back for *comida*."

Back at the *comandante*'s house the talk was all of the ball. Señora Guevarra would ask all of them endlessly if they thought she should wear this gown or that one she had just had made. Ellen thought of the iridescent green

and blue dress Carlos had been so fond of and she winced, wondering which *soldadera* with the outlaws was parading around in it now. Juanita fluttered about like a bird of paradise, every bit as indecisive as the *señora*, and she dragged Ellen on endless shopping expeditions to find exactly the right gown. She fussed over Ellen's hands like a mother hen, pressing upon her different creams and lotions every time she came to the house. Ellen put her foot down, however, on the idea that she should wear mittens and a face mask to bed at night. She really couldn't become very excited about the ball. She didn't need it as an occasion to see her friends, in fact most of them weren't even invited, and she doubted that her dressing up would make any difference to Billy's opinion of her.

In the end, Juanita and Señora Guevarra decided on an emerald green gown cut daringly low in front, with tiers of ruffles on the wide skirt. "I've got just the jewels for you, they're mock emeralds," Señora Guevarra said, cocking her birdlike head. In truth, the green glass of the earrings and necklace might have been made for the dress. They even found in a shop in town a pair of green dancing slippers large enough for her American feet.

"Let's hope that the men she dances with will be graceful enough so they won't have to look at her feet," Juanita observed practically.

"What's this ball in honor of?" Billy asked the morning of the great day. He had been very patient and stayed out of the way during the interminable shopping sprees and trying on of clothes.

"It's the commanding general's wife's birthday," Señora Guevarra answered, surprised that he wouldn't know. "They say the governor is being replaced, so right now General Ruiz is the most important man in Colima. Honorio says that the general has just arrived back from Torreón, where he was observing the preparations for the

campaign against the Carranza rebels. The general thinks Villa is an illiterate savage."

"He may be," Ellen remarked, "but he's a dangerous one." She thought of Edmundo's story of the massacre of the Chinese in Torreón during the Madero campaign and knew that there would be possibly years to come of more blood and more atrocities. Madero, Huerto, Carranza, was there really all that much difference? She found herself glad to be getting out of it all.

The day before the ball they all took a carriage out to Miramar, the beach with the huge waves that she had seen before only in moonlight. Everyone sat fully dressed under beach umbrellas while *mozos* built a fire and prepared an elaborate meal beginning with avocado stuffed with shrimp, followed by barbequed *filete* of venison with roasted pineapple and orange slices, and ending with an overly sweet dessert involving brown sugar and sweet sherry. Billy and Ellen looked at each other ruefully once and then grinned, each knowing that the other was dying to go swimming and challenge those monstrous waves.

Later the two of them walked down the beach barefoot. "Have you thought about what I said?" Billy asked, not looking at her.

"I've thought about little else," she admitted.

"And?"

"Please give me more time, Billy. After we get home, we'll talk about it again, but as long as I'm still in Mexico I'm pulled two ways by the past. Be patient." She thought of Tom's observation about having lots of patience and gentling them enough to do most anything.

Billy turned toward her then and took hold of her shoulders, pulling her to him. "They'll see us," she protested, but he answered, "Let them," and kissed her lingeringly, his mouth insistent.

What wrenched her was that though she returned the kiss, she felt almost nothing, and she wanted to panic. She

broke away. "Not now, Billy. I feel as if I'm in a goldfish bowl."

That night she resisted all his efforts to try to get her to take a walk with him on the Playa Azul.

The afternoon of the ball was passed in bathing and primping and putting up hair in cloth curlers, which Ellen declined to do. Juanita was there as well because she said she couldn't trust Ellen to dress herself properly even with a maid.

"You simply don't have the feel for it," Juanita scolded. "To be a truly beautiful woman you must concentrate on yourself, make every smallest detail add up to a glorious whole. Why do you think I've been after you about your hands? Now I'm going to give you a manicure."

Juanita pushed and bullied Ellen finally into the shoes and the gown and the jewelry and the slightest bit of unobtrusive makeup. Her hair was done in an elaborate braided crown, and she lacked only the long white gloves she would put on as they were leaving. Despite the time spent on Ellen, by the time Juanita surveyed her as a polished whole, she herself was all dressed in a flaming red gown whose flamboyance outshone her protégée's.

"There, Elena, now you look as an enchanting young lady should. Brighten up, child. If I'd had your looks when I was your age..."

"I tell you, I don't really care if I go or not," Ellen said sulkily.

Juanita looked at her. "It's like that, is it? I thought when I saw you kissing your *guero* on the beach that perhaps you'd found what you were looking for. He's a handsome boy, and a sweet one. You could do far worse. Fausto says—"

"I don't care what Fausto says. Juanita, what am I going to do? I want to love Billy, but I'm so used to thinking of him as a brother, it seems like incest."

"Elena, I scolded you once before and I'll do it again. Having things come as you want them, in the exact way you want them, that isn't what life is all about. Everybody has to compromise somewhere. I wouldn't compromise, and look where I've ended."

"I think Fausto's a dear. He's even become quite dashing now that he's worked off all that weight."

"Mind you, I'm very fond of Fausto or I wouldn't have married him, but I've come to my compromise too, and it's turned out to be a reasonable one. There are worse things than to live with someone you're fond of and to do what you can to make life pleasant. I am a compromise for Fausto, too, but the two of us are happy together." She put up her hand to hush Ellen's outburst. "No, let me finish. You are young, and you want all or nothing at all, don't you? The 'nothing at all' is a lonely road, girl. Settle for the kind of life you enjoy with someone you can have fun with. No one does much better than that anyway, because grand passion if you're lucky finally inevitably fades to that, and thank God. Passion hurts, Elena, as I think you already know, and fondness and laughter and doing things with someone you like all heal. I'm fond of you, *muchacha*. I don't know why, except that you've got the kind of spirit I like, and I hate to see you moping around like this and maybe throwing away the one real chance at happiness you'll have."

Ellen smiled at Juanita then. "I'll try, I promise. I think you're right, you know, but it will take some getting used to."

As they descended from the carriage in front of the hotel on the Santiago peninsula, Ellen saw that there was quite a crowd gathered to see the elaborate gowns, the jewels, and the men's formal evening dress as the richly clothed people swept through the entrance. With a pang, she saw Lorenzo and Anita, who waved, and the Yaqui trapeze artists. She wondered if Tom were there some-

where but decided he wasn't. He would never be caught staring at people in ball gowns like a poor child staring through the glass at a candy store.

Inside the ballroom there were clusters of balloons hanging from the ceiling and bright streamers festooned everywhere. As they passed down the receiving line and came to General Ruíz and his wife, the general smiled under his really remarkable mustaches and said to his wife, "My dear, this is the young lady who had all of those extraordinary adventures. You'd never think it to look at her, now would you?"

General Ruíz's, wife, a square-jawed woman with kind eyes who had run to fat, greeted her sympathetically. "*Pobrecita*, what an ordeal you went through! Do you play cards? No? What a pity, we meet every Wednesday and Friday at eleven. You must come to dinner soon." She trailed off vaguely while she shook hands with Billy. Beyond Fausto and Juanita and the colonel and his wife, who were also in the receiving line and who had come in Fausto's carriage, she saw a glittering crowd of dancers and onlookers enjoying themselves while an orchestra in formal dress played a waltz.

Billy took her in his arms and sailed off with her. He was a bit heavy-footed but blessedly easy to follow, and she began to have a good time looking at the other dancers. No sooner had the music stopped than Fausto swept her up, a surprisingly graceful dancer, then the colonel, then General Ruíz, then a handsome young man with sideburns.

"This one is mine, I believe." She couldn't believe her ears and swung around into the arms of Tom, looking strange and handsome in his formal dress. His arms seemed to burn her where they touched, and the hand he held felt electric. In her dismay, she had trouble following him.

"Strange," he said, "I'd have said you'd be rather a

good dancer. But then you always had trouble following, didn't you?"

At a thorough disadvantage, she ignored his barb. "It's because I'm nervous," she admitted. "I'm not good at anything when I'm nervous."

"You aren't, are you?" he goaded her. Then he smiled. "Relax, love, we've all the time in the world."

He was deliberately taunting her. "You've already drawn blood, aren't you satisfied?" she asked. "Why can't you leave me alone?"

"Ah, but who was it dragged her boyfriend out to the circus to make it clear she didn't approve of my latest liaison?"

"Tom, don't. If it's any comfort, I'm sorry I tried to bait you, though I *did* think you had better taste than that."

"You flatter yourself, love. All cats are grey at night."

"They are, aren't they?" She was furious with herself for the tears that threatened to brim over her eyes, and she wouldn't look up at him. "Never mind, I'll be gone by Tuesday, and you won't have any more unpleasant reminders of our journey."

"Yes, I seem to have heard that your father forgave all, greaser and everything, and not only wired money but send an approved emissary."

"Don't start in on Billy, Tom, I'm warning you. He's sweet and decent and—"

"—And all the things I'm not. You can't say I didn't advise you once to marry him, love," he said lightly. "I wish you all the best."

"What about your mother?" Ellen asked, trying to change the subject and praying that this eternal waltz would end soon. "She must have been glad to find you were safe."

"Ah yes, my mother. She certainly didn't send out any inquiries through ambassadors and generals and cabinet members, I assure you. In fact, she didn't even know I'd

been missing, how do you like that?"

"You mean Salvador didn't send her word?" she asked, horrified.

"Oh, he did, but she was in the south of France, you see, and with my grandfather's death and all it took a long time for news to reach her."

"But we were gone a long time."

"When Salvador wired her again after we sent word from Colima, she telegraphed the *comandante* here to ask me not to go to the Alarcon *hacienda* because they're remodelling the house now that the old man's dead. He was against modern conveniences like toilets."

"That was all she said?"

"No 'wish you were here,' if that's what you mean."

Now he was the one having trouble following the music, and she realized he'd had a good deal to drink. "Forget her, Tom, if you can. A woman that selfish should never have been a mother in the first place."

"A little late for that now, isn't it?" His voice was perfectly in control.

"I hope you find a way to be happy, Tom, but until you forgive her, or at least try to understand her, you never will be. You'll carry her around with you as long as you live. And Tom, I really do care about your being happy one day."

"Little ray of sunshine. Don't worry about me, love, I'm too mean to be miserable for long."

"I wish—"

"If wishes were horses, then beggars could ride," he broke in quickly. "I've done everything I know to discourage you, love. I hope I've been successful."

"You are a conceited clod," she replied icily. "As far as I am concerned, I hope I leave before so much as setting eyes on you again."

The music stopped at last, and she jerked away from him as Billy took her hand, evidently not noticing that

they had quarreled. He looked inquiringly at Tom. "May I?" he asked politely.

"Please do." Tom's voice was steady. "Thank you for the dance, *señora*."

She danced in turn with Billy, whose arms she was thankful didn't burn, and Fausto. As they whirled past the doorway, she idly noticed a latecomer, a captain in army uniform. Suddenly he turned his head and she saw who he was.

"Stop, Fausto! It looks like—"

She broke away and went running over, afraid all the way it would turn out to be a mistake. "Antonio! Dear heaven, Antonio, where did you come from?"

He looked very different from the rather untidy bespectacled young doctor she had known. His uniform was immaculate in an army and at a time when uniforms even of generals were often sloppy. He exuded an air of confidence, and he looked positively dashing. Without hesitation he gathered her close in his arms and whirled off with her, holding her harder against him than was at all proper.

"Elena, my dear, I've never been so glad to see anyone!"

"But where have you been? What happened? What are you doing in that uniform?"

He laughed happily. "I've been out looking for you. When the *comandante* realized his own soldiers had turned you back north of Manzanillo, I went out with the search party. You led us a merry chase, I must say. We went to Colima and then back to the coast and north as far as Boca de las Iguanas, and not a sign of you."

"But didn't Colonel Guevarra get word to you that we'd come in?"

"The lines were down as usual, and they don't go any farther than Barra de Navidad anyway. I only just got in and found out where you were."

"You haven't answered me about the uniform."

"The army has a special branch of troubleshooters now, a kind of combined intelligence and tactical group. My group covers the Colima-southwestern Jalisco area. We'd been after Manco for months, especially because we were afraid some of these bandit groups would join up, as with Negrito they almost did. The plan was for someone who turned out to be me to insinuate himself as a civilian into Tocoalco, which seemed to be a place Manco returned to often, and discover if I could where his mountain hideout was. Rural small town people are suspicious of outsiders, and the only way I would be even partially accepted was as a doctor or as a priest. They already had a priest, so I was a doctor."

"You mean you stayed there a whole year pretending to practice medicine?" Ellen felt indignant for those poor women and their dying babies.

"Not as bad as that. I studied medicine in the United States and interned at Massachusetts General. With a few textbooks I venture to say I made out as well as many doctors down here, and better than most. Common sense and the happy rule that most illnesses are self-limiting are the most important instruments in a doctor's bag."

"How could you bear to give up being a doctor for fighting these senseless wars?"

"This is my country, Elena, and this is now how I can serve her best."

"You seem different. Not so diffident, more self-assured."

"I've gone back to being my old nasty self. Does it meet with your approval?"

"You came very close to seducing me up there in the pines as it was."

He sobered. "I'm glad I didn't. We'd both have felt bad about it afterward with that poor man only just dead."

She remembered Tom saying something like that at the sulphur pool at Zacatlán. Would that he and she had both

stuck to it. "I'm not glad, but that's safe to say because I'm leaving for California on Tuesday."

"Not if I can talk you out of it," he said boldly. "Have dinner with me tomorrow night, please?"

"I don't think unchaperoned ladies are supposed to do things like that with dashing army captains."

"What difference does it make, you're leaving anyway."

"And if I decide to stay?"

"If you decide to stay, they think all *gringas* are crazy anyway. Why do you think no one has said anything about your not glooming about in black and staying shut in your room with smelling salts?"

"All right," she laughed, "though the *comandante* and his wife are going to think it awfully strange. By the way, why did everyone pretend not to have heard of you? I went to the Pedraza house and asked the *comandante* and everyone I could think of."

He clapped his hand to his forehead. "*Diós mío*, I forgot to tell you that my real name is Pedraza y Castillo."

The rest of the evening the dances alternated between Antonio and Billy, both of them engaged in wooing her as irresistibly as they could manage. After the dreadful beginning to the ball, Ellen found herself enjoying everything immensely. It did her pride no end of good to be desired for a change instead of rejected, and she would have been completely happy if Tom could have witnessed their squabbling amiably over whose dance it was, but there was no sign of him. Both of them took her in to the buffet, an astonishing array of delicacies ranging from lobster to genuine caviar, cold boned quail stuffed with avocado, several whole roast suckling pigs, sides of beef, oysters, deviled clams, pickled tongue, smoked ham, seafood mousse, five kinds of salad, flans, tarts, cakes, and of course champagne. For the first time since her arrival in Manzanillo, she ate with a hearty appetite, savoring each

mouthful, and she even managed to become a little tiddly on champagne, which she danced off later on as the night turned to morning.

It must have nearly dawn when the ball broke up, and even so there were still couples whirling about as Ellen's party went to get their wraps, laughing and teasing. Their hosts were staying on and would sleep at the hotel, but the *comandante* and his wife and Fausto and Juanita all headed for the cloakroom together. It was only as Ellen got there that she saw Tom standing next to a strikingly handsome woman with black hair and creamy skin, holding her wrap for her, oblivious to anyone around him. The woman gave him a dazzling smile, and on his face Ellen could see the familiar tender look around the mouth and the intent darkening of his blue eyes that spelled intense physical desire. The pain that shot through her then was so exquisite that she nearly doubled over and clutched herself like the poor wounded *vaquero* at Oro.

Mercifully the hurt cauterized the shrinking flesh as it passed through, and she was able then to smile in her turn at Antonio and Billy, who were arguing laughingly as to who would hold her wrap. Antonio bowed and impressed a passionate kiss on her hand. "Until tomorrow, *querida*." Somehow in the confusion, Colonel Guevarra and his wife ended up in Fausto's carriage, and she and Billy were alone in the *comandante's*. Ellen suspected Juanita's hand in it. Since a *mozo* was driving and the two carriages were following each other closely, they were hardly unchaperoned.

"So that is Antonio," Billy said thoughtfully. "I didn't picture him as anything like that."

"He didn't used to be like that, either. What a change!"

"For the better?"

"I'd be lying if I didn't say he's far more romantic now."

"Are you in love with him?"

"No, Billy, I'm not. Maybe I could be, given time, just

as I could be with you, but in his case there's no time."
"I take it you're going out to dinner with him tomorrow?"

"Yes, I am. Why don't you go to the circus? You'd enjoy it, especially since you've met the performers, and we've all seen it."

"Maybe I will. I'd like to see the dressage." There was a tone of irony in his voice that made her wonder if he had caught more of Tom's and her interchange than she thought.

Everyone slept late the next day, and when she woke the noon sun was striking in bright bars through the hardwood louveres of the windows. She lay there enjoying the langorous feeling of sleeping so late, thinking of the events of the night before. On the edge of her consciousness there nagged the memory of a dream that would fade entirely once she was fully awake. All at once she knew it had been of Coxo and she was being made love to, but the face of her lover was blank. Not hidden, blank.

That just about summed it up, she thought drearily, the outside world crashing in on her again. She had weathered the worst and come through well, but how fortunate there was no reason to see Tom again. Fausto was taking back the mare in the hopeful expectation that she was in foal to Adiós, whom he admired immensely. Tom with the mules was riding back to Guadalajara through Autlán this time, and he had arranged with two horsebreakers who wanted to try their luck around Guadalajara to ride the mules. Three well-armed determined men would give all but the most desperate outlaws pause before bothering them. Ellen was taking her saddle with her on the ship, almost the last token of Carlos she had left.

That evening a carriage pulled up to the door, bearing Antonio and a beautiful young girl dressed all in white with a white *rebozo* over her black hair. "Heavens," Ellen

thought, "he's come to tell me he's changed his mind."

Antonio was very formal and introduced the girl all around. "May I present Señorita Esperanza Pedrazo y Castillo, my sister, who will accompany us this evening."

Ellen laughed as she saw Billy draw a long breath. Even Señora Guevarra looked relieved, and Ellen saw that the conventions had been bothering her hostess who had nevertheless not felt like pressing them. Billy surprised her by kissing Esperanza's hand gallantly. "I'm learning fast, aren't I?" he grinned.

They went off waving down the drive and over the long causeway to the city, the sorrels trotting along at a good clip. They threaded their way through unfamiliar streets and ended up in front of the house where Ellen had asked for him and been told that a Dr. García was unknown there.

"All right, *chiquita*, scram!" Antonio said unceremoniously to his sister, who promptly stuck out her tongue at him.

"Just remember," she reminded him, "what you promised in return."

He laughed and tapped her lightly with the end of the buggy whip. "I stick to my bargains." They drove off.

"What was your bargain?"

"She has a *novio* of whom my parents do not approve, so I take her to the plaza to meet him."

"You leave her alone with him?"

"Do you think I'm mad? I don't approve of him either, and even if I did I would never turn my sister over to a man she wasn't married to. This way, however, she'll have the opportunity to become tired of him, which she wouldn't if she weren't allowed to see him at all. My brothers and I are taking turns chaperoning her."

Ellen sighed. "You go out with me alone."

"That's different. To begin with, you're a widow."

"I've gathered that most men here have no interest in

marrying widows, who are, ah, shop-worn goods, so to speak."

"Don't try me, Elena. To me you could never be, as you quaintly put it, shop-worn goods. I'll admit that had I met you in society here in Manzanillo, it might have been different, but I saw what a courageous woman you were, besides being beautiful, and I fell in love with you in spite of myself."

She thought of the pine forest and the smoked meat and the helpless death-watch over a dying man. She smiled at him. "I was afraid there for a moment that you were another Mexican *macho* male who wanted me only for my fair white body."

"Sometimes I think you say these things only to shock."

"No, I say what I think. Are you trying to tell me you want to marry me, Antonio?"

He stopped the carriage in the street and looked at her, his eyes a light amber in the lights of the carriage. "I hadn't thought of it until last night, but yes, I do."

"I won't play games with you, Antonio. I honestly don't know what to say, any more than I know what to say to Billy. I'm not being coy or playing hard to get, I really don't know."

He started the horses again. "So why don't we go have dinner and begin finding out?"

They had butterflied shrimp for an hors d'oeuvre and stuffed red snapper with a glorious sauce at a small restaurant off the plaza. While they were eating, Antonio spoke of what had happened to him since the time of Manco's camp.

"Tom set me free and gave me a gun, but told me to pretend to remain tied until I heard a fusillade of shots. He hoped my guard would go investigate, but if he didn't, I was to shoot him. Unhappily I had to shoot him."

"If you'd left him alive, they'd have been after you in no time."

He shrugged. "They were very drunk, and I don't think they would have caught me. As it was, there was no guard at all on the horses, and Tom had the mare already saddled for me. At Colima I borrowed a uniform in which to see Colonel Lopez, and tried to get him to agree to ambushing Manco, but he wouldn't go for it. He told me when I was there looking for you the other day that they got Manco after all. Anyway, I went on then to Manzanillo to wait for you."

When Ellen got to the part of her story about Colorado having them stripped before turning them loose, he burst into a shout of laughter. "I can see why that didn't get into the official report."

"That doesn't offend your sense of propriety?"

"Come now, Elena, I've got a better sense of humor than that. All Mexican men aren't stuffy prigs, you know."

She told him then about Tom's producing the cigar while they were leaning against the tree waiting to see if the alcohol would work. He laughed again. "That Tomás, he's some man." He shook his head, still laughing. "You know what he's up to now? He's having an open affair with Magdalena, the widow of an ex-mayor here. Her brothers are reportedly out gunning for him, but I notice they are taking care not to find him. General Contreras has let it be known that Tomás is a better shot even than he is."

Dear Fausto, she thought. He was so loyal even when he didn't approve. "Tom does seem to make his mark, all right," she said dryly.

Afterward they spoke of more general things as they strolled around the large plaza near the waterfront. The air was warm and smelled of the sea. They saw townspeople with their wives, sailors from the two ships that were docked, army uniforms, street vendors, and what seemed like thousands of children running and playing tag and fighting in and out between the couples strolling around

the outside of the plaza. Toward the center there were two thick currents, one of boys and one of girls, each passing each other in the opposite direction. The girls giggled and fluttered their fans, the boys poked each other and guffawed, each trying not to appear to have the slightest interest in who was passing in the opposite direction.

"Like most towns, every Sunday evening is the promenade, the girls one way, the boys another. I served a long apprenticeship with that when I was growing up," Antonio laughed. "What you do is to pass notes back and forth that you hope your parents, who are circling on the outside, won't see. Of course, they know perfectly well what goes on because it is what they did themselves when they were young, only it was harder then because there were few girls who knew how to read. Even now there are many who don't."

"When you see a scene like this, you wonder how there can be all the fighting and killing going on elsewhere. It's been three years now, and nothing is settled."

"It'll be worse before it gets better. Carranza, Obregon, and Villa are all raising men and supplies in the north, and by the end of summer the skirmishes we've seen will turn into open war, a war that the army will never win. Zapata is still strong in Morelia, and he hates Huerta, who they say is now drunk all the time. He does his government business in bars around Mexico City."

"And you are fighting on this man's side?"

"No, my dear. I am fighting, not the revolutionaries, but the bandits."

"How do you tell the difference?"

"I don't know. With the Mancos, it's easy, but with the Colorados, it isn't. Villa himself is half one and half the other, and if he were down here, I'd probably have to be out after him. Mexico is going to be torn to pieces until the people get tired enough of fighting to settle for half a loaf because they'll never get a whole one. By next year I

could be fighting under Carranza, and when he goes, which the stiff-necked stuffy old bastard undoubtedly will, I'll be fighting under someone else. The best of the lot so far is Obregon, but he may not survive the fighting."

"Let's not talk of the war. I've had enough of it."

"So you have, *querida*. Come on."

They went back to where a boy had been watching the carriage, and they set off once again through the streets alive with Sunday strollers headed for the plaza. As they came to a small bridge over a waterway, Ellen saw flares shining out over the water.

"It's shrimpers. The flares attract the shrimp to the nets. They keep them in the water until it's time for market early in the morning."

The scene was graven on her memory, Antonio's arm around her now and the lighted platforms floating out in the black water that threw flaming reflections back in the faces of the barelegged fishermen standing on the wooden rafts. Antonio gently turned her to him and kissed her, his mouth as sure as Tom's, but it was Tom's eyes darkening with desire that she saw behind her closed eyelids, and she opened them to see the torchlight shining in Antonio's amber ones as he drew back and looked at her. He smiled. "That is just a beginning," he said.

Despite his talk of a beginning, he did not even attempt to kiss her again on the way home. She would be going the day after tomorrow, and so beginnings would be endings. She began to realize how much she would be leaving: the circus people, Fausto and Juanita, Antonio—the list was growing longer and longer. They turned in at the drive that had two lanterns hanging out on the gateposts.

"Will I see you again?" she asked, half dreading his answer.

"But of course I'll be there to see you off, *querida*. I wouldn't miss it for worlds," he replied cheerfully.

"Oh Antonio, I'll miss you," she cried, and kissed him

again as he handed her down out of the carriage. She wondered briefly what the *mozo* holding the horses thought, but forgot him immediately.

When they entered the house, the colonel exclaimed, "You're so early! Señor Morton isn't even back yet, and he only went to the circus."

"My sister was taken ill," Antonio lied shamelessly, "and I didn't think I should continue in Señora Alvarez's company when she was unchaperoned." They both looked at the colonel demurely.

"Remember," Ellen said as he left, "you promised to see me off on Tuesday."

The next day was spent packing, a task Ellen hated. She had just gotten to feel a bit at home here, and now she had to leave. Before she knew her father had remarried, she would have packed cheerfully; now she wasn't sure if she had a home or not. It certainly wouldn't be the same one she had left. Thank God for Billy. More and more he was seeming the only solid person in her life who would never leave her, never change, never hurt her.

Tuesday morning, with Fausto and Juanita and Billy and all the baggage, they detoured around by the circus to say goodbye. "I'll never forget you," she cried, "any of you. *Buena suerte*, good luck! We'll meet again somehow." There was no sign of Tom, nor did she look for him. He was no doubt staying with the beautiful Magdalena in a different kind of Trinidad. As they left, she turned around a last time to see Alonzo and Doroteo and Raúl with his bear—even the bear was waving. Then her eyes swam with tears and she couldn't see them anymore.

At the dock, Billy and Fausto went off to see to the baggage. She looked for Antonio while making conversation with Juanita.

"You're looking for your *capitán*, are you? Or is it Tomás?" Juanita asked shrewdly.

"I said goodbye to Tom at the ball," Ellen answered

airily. "It's Antonio, he promised to come down to see me off."

"Just as well Tomás is out of the running now—wounded animals can be dangerous. In fact it's a good thing you're leaving," Juanita observed tartly, "or you'd find yourself tied to another Mexican husband. That Antonio has a great deal of charm, and I have a feeling that if he exerted himself he would leave your Guillermo, your Billy, far behind. Sweet men make wonderful husbands, but women always seem to prefer the stinkers."

"I would hardly call Antonio a stinker."

"Perhaps not, but my experience tells me he would have you in no time if you weren't leaving. He knows what he's doing, that one."

Ellen laughed. "You could be right."

Juanita put a hand on her arm. "Elena, whatever you do, don't marry a Mexican again. We women here are used to it, but for you, and especially now, it would soon become impossible. If the man married you, a widow, he would always think he had done you an enormous favor, and that's no way to begin. For your sake I hope there aren't a lot of dashing Latin *caballeros* wandering around your Santa Barbara. Stay with Guillermo, Elena—he'll always be kind."

The dock around them was crowded now with passengers and well wishers both. As it became more and more apparent from events in the north that serious fighting would begin again soon, those who had the money and had been thinking of leaving before, were now getting out. General Huerta had made many enemies in his time, and there were *maderistas* who rightly or wrongly felt that somehow the assassin of Madero would seek them out. They remembered all too well what had happened to Abraham Gonzales, the pro-Madero governor of Chihuahua, not three months before. He was imprisoned in Chihuahua City, then while being transferred by train to

another prison, in Bachimba Canyon he was thrown under the wheels and buried alongside the track. There were those in Manzanillo who already referred to Huerta as the Butcher.

The *North Star's* whistle blew a deep throaty blast, and there was a concerted rush for the gangplank. Ellen had made Billy wait until the last minute, still hoping to see Antonio, but now she turned and embraced Fausto and Juanita, tears in her eyes. "I'll write," she promised. "We mustn't lose each other."

A hand closed on her arm. "Hurry up, *querida*, or we'll miss the ship."

She turned to find a grinning Antonio. "What do you mean, 'we'?"

"Didn't you know?" he asked in mock innocence. "I am booked for the *North Star*, too."

She felt Billy's hand on her other arm close convulsively, and she knew that this was hardly welcome news for him. "Come on then, gentlemen," she laughed, "or we'll all miss the ship."

As she mounted the wooden gangplank with Billy holding her arm on one side and Antonio on the other, she had no way of knowing that Tom watched her departure as he sipped a brandy in a small open air cafe with a view of the pier. "*Que le vaya bien*, love," he said out loud, his eyes bleak as he saw her returning to another world forever beyond his reach.

CHAPTER XXII

The buckskin horse picked his way down the trail to where the slope lessened, and walked out easily under the group of sycamores by the stream. He had been this way many times, and Ellen let him have his head. It was May of a year of heavy rains, and the grass was lush and green, only faintly showing the golden sheen that by June would have turned completely yellow. The trail was even still damp in places, the horse's hoofs making no sound on last year's dead sycamore leaves. Ellen dismounted and unsaddled him, putting on a halter with a long rope in place of his bridle.

"Have a good feed, Pancho," she said to him as she gave him a pat on the shoulder.

A few yards farther on the beach began, and unhurriedly she changed to chopped off pants, a man's sleeveless undershirt, and sandals. All the times she had been here since she had come home, she had never seen anyone, and now she didn't even bother to bring along a proper bathing costume. She passed the whale skeleton with a

pat, and put down her towel and the saddle bag with her lunch and clothes on the warm sand. The water felt icy. She never got over how cold the water seemed here after Trinidad—cold and full of red seaweed and black tar that seeped naturally from underwater crevasses. The Channel Indians had caulked their primitive boats with it for centuries before the Spaniards came. The first wave was a poor ride, but the second one took her down the sandy reef with a satisfying rush, the water tumbling and foaming about her. When she was tired, she stretched out shivering on the towel in the sun.

Her father had met the train bringing her back to Santa Barbara. For some reason she was surprised that he hadn't changed, but she could tell from his stricken expression that she must have changed a great deal. He said nothing at first, only hugged her hard, his eyes closed.

"What have they done to you?" he asked at last.

"Nothing, Papa. It's just that I was so seasick coming back. For days I couldn't eat anything at all."

They had no sooner gotten beyond the Manzanillo shipping channel than the wind started and the waves built up. Far from the romantic voyage she had visualized, with two suitors dancing attendance on her battered ego, the whole journey had been a nightmare with a storm that followed them, passed them, and left them lurching about in its wake. Billy had been almost as sick as she, and she couldn't decide if his pale tottering was the more discouraging or Antonio's obscenely cheerful card playing with the few other hardy men on board. The first time she saw him in the saloon riffing the cards expertly with a long cigar in his grinning mouth, her stomach turned sickeningly and she hastened back to her stateroom that, thank God, she had to herself. Antonio brought her and Billy both sea biscuit and water from time to time between his day long card games.

"Keep trying to eat this, *querida*. If you can keep even

just a little on your stomach, you'll feel better." He stood there absorbing with maddening ease the violent lurches that always sent her staggering into walls. He was so solicitous and so sympathetic that sometimes she would cry weakly between retches. There seemed to be no way that he would ever continue to want her after this nightmare ordeal was over. She wondered if Tom might have viewed her differently as well had he not delivered her child in all that blood and mess and seen her dirty, smelly, and unkempt. She rolled her head back and forth on the pillow and wanted to die. The worst day of all came when she staggered up and found that her period had begun. She had to face then her all but unconscious deep wish to have been with child again, and she wept bitterly, too wretched in mind and body to care if Antonio saw her like that or not.

All three of them got off the ship in Los Angeles, where she and Billy miraculously recovered almost as soon as their feet hit dry ground. The last several days had already lessened their misery from complete prostration to mere queasiness, but neither of them felt like running around the now sunny deck as did Antonio and his more seaworthy friends. Once in Los Angeles, Billy was happy enough to go to his hotel room, have an early supper, and go to bed while Antonio took her out for a farewell dinner in Chinatown. Because of his knowledge of English, he would be going on to Texas the next day to help arrange for arms shipments to the government troops.

As the Chinese waiter brought them their green tea and a clear soup in which floated delicate noodles, Antonio leaned over and took her hand.

"Elena, marry me. Right now, or as soon as we can get whatever papers we have to get."

"Antonio, I don't know what to say. I don't want you to be cheated, and I don't want to be cheated either. I can't tell you now."

Then he made an enormous mistake. "You shouldn't wait too long, Elena. You need my protection."

"How so?" she asked, not at once following what he meant.

"You are a widow, Elena, and you'll be fair game for every adventurer who comes along."

"Oh? You mean I won't be able to resist them? I'll be a notorious woman who has affairs like the beautiful Magdalena? How exciting!"

"Elena, you know very well what I mean." He was exasperated. "A woman who is no longer, ah, a maiden and yet has no man to protect her is in a terribly compromising position. Men who prey on women look for ones like you."

She didn't know whether to laugh or cry, and so did neither. "Antonio you're very sweet and you've been the soul of discretion with me, but I'm afraid I'm not interested in getting married for protection. Anyway, what would your family think? You know they wouldn't approve."

"Oh, they'd get used to it," he said breezily, but she remembered all too well Salvador's and Margarita's implacable dislike.

"No, Antonio dear, I can't go to Nacozari with you."

"*Como?*" he asked, confused.

"Sorry. I only meant I don't think we'd better try marriage. Have some sweet and sour pork and the chicken in parchment, they're both delicious."

He shook his head, automatically taking pieces from the dishes she handed him. "Elena, I don't understand you."

"Don't worry about it, Antonio—few people seem to."

"I suppose you're in love with your *guero* cowhand."

"Do I have to be in love with someone? Come now, Antonio, don't forget you're a gentleman. I tell you what; since I won't marry you, the least I can do is go to your

hotel room with you. What do you say? I'm offering you the role of the very first adventurer."

His look of genuine shock startled her into laughing. "You can't mean that, Elena," he protested. Then seeing she was amused, "It's no joking matter," he said crossly.

"I'm sorry, Antonio. I *do* love you, only it's as a friend, not as a husband. You'll be happier with a nice girl of your class that your parents pick out for you." She patted his hand. "Now how about ordering us another round of the pork and that marvellous chicken? After that unspeakable voyage, I'm starved."

He sulked through the rest of the meal, and she didn't see him again before their train left early the next morning.

As much as she had thought of home when she had been in Mexico, now that she was here, she went on feeling maddeningly detached from it, as if she were looking at a photograph. The golden hills and green oaks were every bit as lovely as she remembered, but somehow she was on the outside looking in. Mary, her stepmother, turned out to be a pleasant surprise. A poised, gracious woman, she had sense enough to refrain from trying to change Ellen's ways. Rosa, thank God, was the same as always: calm, unhurried, capable, and loving. They went often to the settlement at Las Cruces, and Ellen taught school there two days a week, her pupils ranging from seven-year-olds up to several married women and Vicente, an old man who told her that all his life he had wished to learn to read and write, which made her feel ashamed. When she wasn't teaching, she was finishing off three green broke colts. When she rode hard enough, she had no trouble sleeping; otherwise she had fearful half-waking dreams of Edmundo's obscenely cocked head, Carlos's suppurating shoulder, the wounded mare, César's dying head on Demetrio's lap, and the clay color

of the young *vaquero's* face when he died in the blowing sand of Oro. Until she came home, she had never dreamed so vividly of all these things. The dreams were meercifully becoming fewer and farther between as time went on.

Billy loved her and knew her, and he didn't bring up marriage again, content to wait until her sickness of spirit healed itself. A year and a half after her return, he told her that they were selling the Morton ranch, including the strip that took in Coxo, to an outfit called the Smith Brothers Cattle Company. Her father's game leg had never recovered, and he was no longer interested in increasing his holdings. The Mortons had bought a ranch up around Paso Robles that according to Billy could be put partly into permanent pasture since there was plenty of water, and triple the number of head of cattle they could run.

"I'll keep on coming to see you from time to time," he said. "One day you'll look at me, Ellie, and I'll know you're finally home."

She had been genuinely upset by the inexplicable arrival, six months after her return, of a large trunk containing her clothes from the *hacienda* and Carlos's share of his mother's jewels that he had given Ellen so long ago. There was also a little packet of shells and with it a lock of blonde hair. It all seemed like a voice from the dead. Mary and Rosa in tacit agreement put the trunk away in the storeroom as it was until such time as Ellen might want it.

About the time of the sale of the Morton ranch, Ellen's father received from Salvador a copy of Carlos's will that he had made out when he knew Ellen was pregnant. He wrote that Santa Cruz had indeed been sold and asked what was to be done with Ellen's inheritance now that the will was probated. Ellen didn't even want to look at it. "Tell him to have my funds transferred here," she said listlessly. "You can arrange it with the bank, can't you, Papa?" She hesitated. "Tell him too that any property

there is he and Margarita can divide as they wish."

Just two years ago in the early spring, she thought now as she lay on the warm sand at Coxo, we were with the circus. It bothered her that her memories of the trek from Santa Cruz to Manzanillo never seemed to fade, and she tried not to dwell on them. The good parts were gone forever along with the people, and the bad ones were all but unbearable still. La Trinidad she tried not to think of at all.

The sun was warm, without the burning intensity of the Mexican coast, and she drifted off into a light doze, dreaming that she and Billy were here at Coxo. They were coming out of the water laughing, and her sleep was so light that her conscious mind thought, at last I'm coming round, it's going to be all right. Billy was due to come see her this afternoon or tomorrow, and she found that she was looking forward to it almost with excitement. Dear Billy, he was like a part of her. So many of her childhood memories involved him, she always knew even what he was thinking. He was patient and loving, all any woman could wish in a husband. She wished that she could tell him everything that had happened to her, but whenever she started to, he would stop her.

"Don't, Ellie. You should try to forget all that. It's unhealthy to dwell on it."

She wondered drowsily if she would ever feel completely at ease with all of them like her father and Billy who wanted to protect her from the past, rather than exorcise it by sharing her experiences. She fell asleep again, and this time she and Billy were on his ranch in Paso Robles that she had never seen. He was gripping her shoulders with both hands, trying to convince her of something, his light blue eyes that she had to look up into innocent and guileless. His eyes darkened then in a way she knew well, and somehow she was able to see over his shoulder that the porpoises were playing down the bay. The man who

held her was smaller than Billy and leaner, harder. A cloud came over the sun and shadowed them as they stood there, the darkness waking her to find that she was shadowed in reality as well as in the dream.

"You'll get burned, sleeping in the sun like that, love."

Confused, she looked up at the rider on the chestnut stallion and knew that her mind, held together so tenuously sometimes since her return, had finally given way. If this apparition could seem so real—she could even hear the chinking of the bit as *Adiós* pulled at it restlessly—then before long it would be the dying Carlos and the dead Edmundo, poor little Lety with her bloody thighs and even Chirlo who would surround her now in her waking hours as well.

"It can't be," she whispered, her heart threatening to pound its way from her breast.

"Did you think I wouldn't finally have to come?" Tom asked.

"I thought never to see you again," she replied shakily, beginning to recover her equilibrium, half believing now that he was real.

He swung a foot over, sitting for a moment sideways on the saddle, then landed gracefully on his feet, a movement of his so familiar she felt a wrench. *Adiós* stood with the reins down and Tom paid no more attention to him. "Would you rather I went away?"

She didn't answer that. "I never had a child, you know—you didn't have to come at all."

He pulled her to her feet and smoothed back her water-tangled hair. "I knew you didn't bear our child. What I didn't know was that you would be riding with me when I rode up through Autlán and Cocula to Zacatlán, that you would be waiting there in Guadalajara and God help me in every lady's bed I entered trying to forget you. That because of you I didn't even mind when I found that Salvador had already sold Santa Cruz. You'd have been

waiting for me in every room and been with me on every ride. I did manage to rescue your things from Margarita's clutches and sent them on. A *vigilante* group from the nearby *haciendas* encouraged Negrito's people to settle for the horses."

"The trunk came, and with it the lock of hair and the shells." She could still remember the hurt of seeing them, the lovely convoluted twice-rejected shells.

"I thought then if I could rid myself of everything that reminded me of you, I'd be free again."

"What have you been doing all this time?"

"I went soldiering, love."

"Soldiering? I thought you considered the revolution little more than an excuse for killing and looting."

"Better that than drinking myself to death. My father never seemed to have all that much fun at it. Besides, there is something about risking your life that seems to drive most other concerns out of your head. I still thought I could stay away. I chose Obregon as the best of a bad lot. I was with him when Villa even sent a train to kill him after a meeting in Chihuahua. An impulsive man, our Francisco, but that move cost him dearly."

"What made you decide to quit?"

A flicker of—pain? anger?—crossed his face. "That was back in September. Last month, April, Villa sent his best cavalry, his *Dorados*, against us in Celaya, where we had machine guns and barbed wire. Those crazy fools put their horses at the wire until all you could hear was the screaming of animals and men. The town changed hands twice, but they were all lost, two thousand of them. A week later Villa came again, and this time it was close to four thousand he lost. There were bodies lying on either side of the railroad tracks as far as you could see. I was with Castro's cavalry when we fell on those left from the north, from behind them. They threw down their rifles and ran, poor devils. The vultures that came were soon

too full to fly, and the burial parties clubbed them to death and buried them in trenches along with the men." Tom held up his hands. "I dream at night that these are drenched in blood, they glisten with it. I never knew there could be so much blood." His eyes lifted from his hands to her face again. "There were times we looked at death together, you and I—there's not another woman anywhere I could talk to of Celaya."

"You're wrong. There are thousands of women now who know all about Celaya," she said sadly, "the mothers and daughters and wives and sweethearts."

He was looking at her as if memorizing each feature. "I never want to fight again—not ever. After that last battle I ran into Antonio, of all people, he's a colonel now. With Huerta out, he decided to join Carranza. He was a liason between Carranza in Veracruz and Obregon's Army of Operations. We got drunk together, and he told me how you'd turned him down." Tom laughed. "You hadn't changed a bit, had you? Then he said that from the couple of letters you'd written, you hadn't married your big *guero* after all. When I saw you go up that gangplank with the two of them, I wanted to break your neck."

She didn't question his having seen her at the boat. "No, Tom, I haven't married anyone." Time seemed suspended, and she thought once more that she was probably still dreaming.

"Your father told me you'd ridden down to the beach, and I knew where you must be. He's worried about you."

She shrugged and gave a faint smile. "I can't seem to help it. I was just thinking today that I had gotten to the place where I was looking forward to Billy's coming, and now all that's in shambles." Her eyes filled with tears. "It took me so long to come to that. Why did you come, Tom? Surely not to tell me about Celaya."

"I came to tell you I'm not free anymore, I haven't been for a long time." He regarded her steadily. "Carlos was

generous with me in his will, and my grandfather left me some money as well. You must have know about Carlos, you got a copy of the will, surely."

"I didn't read it," she said bleakly. "I didn't want to think about any of it, but I'm glad for you, Tom."

"I'm glad, too. I bought a ranch in California. In fact, I could have you arrested for trespassing."

"You *what*? You bought the Morton ranch? But I thought—"

He grinned. "Meet the Smith Brothers Cattle Company."

"That was long before you saw Antonio."

"Let's say I had faith. If you'd been taken, I could always sell it again and none the wiser."

"Why didn't you come then?"

"I was afraid to."

She put a wondering hand up to his cheek, and with an inarticulate cry he buried his face in her throat. "I didn't know it was possible to miss anyone so. There wasn't a night I didn't think of Trinidad and curse the memory." He lifted his head, his face naked and vulnerable as she had never seen it. "I haven't changed," he warned. "I'm still mean and impatient and moody and *macho*. I wanted you to marry your uncomplicated Billy and be happy. Then I'd remember the impatient way you'd toss that stray lock of hair back off your face while you squatted over a fire cooking, your face smudged, dressed in those dirty old pants of Carlos's, and I'd ache for you. I should have known what was happening when I came on you with Manco's bunch and saw you kissing Antonio. It was as if someone had slipped a knife in me."

"I know. It was like that for me when I saw how you were looking at Magdalena at the ball. Why didn't you ever tell me?"

"I'm the one who never belonged, remember? If I never committed myself to any place or anyone, I could never

get hurt. There is the one way I have changed. At last I know where I belong."

"Welcome to Nacozari, love," she murmured as she held him hard against her, and over his shoulder she could see two gulls crying to each other as they slid a long graceful slant down the gentle western wind that ruffled the water past the end of the reef.